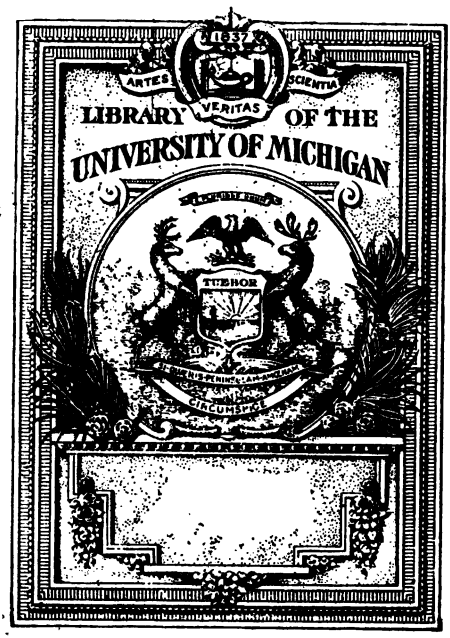

Xmas 1893.

Elizabeth B. A. Rathbone
October 1900

SERMONS

PREACHED IN A VILLAGE CHURCH

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THE ALL-FATHER

SERMONS PREACHED IN A VILLAGE CHURCH

BY THE

REV. P. H. NEWNHAM

WITH PREFACE BY EDNA LYALL

'He being dead yet speaketh'—*Heb.* xi. 4

SECOND EDITION

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1891

Eliz. A. Rathbone
at
5-9-1923

TO ALL THOSE WHO HAVE EVER VALUED HIS TEACHING

AND NOW LOVINGLY CHERISH HIS MEMORY

THIS LITTLE VOLUME OF HIS SERMONS IS DEDICATED

BY HIS WIFE

PREFACE

I HAVE BEEN ASKED to write a preface to the following sermons, and though I do not think they need any introduction, yet I gladly yield to Mrs. Newnham's wish, and welcome the chance of being connected in this slight way with the work of one who, during nine years, was my most loving friend and teacher.

The sermons were all preached in a country church, and this perhaps in part explains one of their chief characteristics—their extreme simplicity. But the writer's mind was one of rare depth and originality, and, though working for the greater part of his life in remote country districts, he did not hide his light under a bushel or give his people mere platitudes. He made them think.

Never can I forget the first sermon I heard him preach. It was at a mission-room down in the fishing village a mile from his parish church,—a bare little

room lighted with oil lamps and filled with eager listeners. As we drove home in the dark I recollect his saying—'Well, what do you think of our little place?'

And with the memory of his clear, forcible teaching still fresh in my mind I replied, 'I think that the Kingsand people ought to be very good.'

The other chief characteristic of his sermons seems to me their depth. No conventional, superficial view of the subject contented him. He insisted on going to the root of the matter, on making his hearers ask themselves what they meant by the words which they were in the habit of saying so glibly and mechanically.

And surely this is what is particularly needed now. No surface-teaching can strengthen and prepare the mind for nineteenth-century life. It is impossible to take up a book, a magazine, or a newspaper without having the great difficulties of the day forced upon us, and

> The humming of the dreary pulpit drone

can never help us to face aright the questions and problems of our time. We need living words, not dead formalities; fresh thoughts, not empty phrases; the straightforward facing of doubts and perplexities, not the weak and lazy shelving of the subject.

And because the mingled simplicity and depth of these sermons seems to me to supply a great need, I trust they may be widely read.

The writer's life in that lonely west-country parish, his unwearying and patient toil, his brave efforts to do his parish work in the very best way possible, in spite of physical sufferings which would have daunted most men—all this can be fully known only to a few. But those of us who knew and loved him have a great longing that his influence, so powerful yet so restricted by circumstances during his lifetime, should now reach a wider circle. As I write there comes to my mind the epitaph on Andrew Rykman's grave, quoted in one of Whittier's poems:—

> Trust is truer than our fears,
> Gain is not in added years,
> Nor in death is loss.

This, it seems to me, is the keynote of the following sermons—the keynote, too, of the writer's life.

May something of his keen realisation of the Infinite and Eternal be given to us, his readers.

EDNA LYALL.

EASTBOURNE: *March* 2, 1889.

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TEN-MINUTE SERMONS

SERMONS ON THE LORD'S PRAYER.

I.

THE TRUE MODEL OF PRAYER.

'After this manner, therefore, pray ye.'—MATT. vi. 9.

I SUPPOSE that most clergymen, at some time or other of their ministerial lives, preach what is called a 'course' of Sermons on the Lord's Prayer; and scores of volumes of these sermons have been printed and published. And it is good, too, that this should be the case; for each new mind brings some new thought, or some new way of putting an old thought; and each thought thus contributed helps to swell the sum total of our intelligent conceptions on the subject.

I, too, will try to help my parishioners, and my hearers generally, by setting before them some of the thoughts which seem to my mind most naturally to group themselves around the various clauses of that prayer which our Lord Himself has taught and commanded us to use.

And at the very outset, I would ask you to notice that our Lord gave this Prayer to His followers on two very different occasions.

The first occasion was that to which our text alludes. In the course of the Sermon on the Mount, when He was addressing large assembled multitudes, He taught them these words, not so much as a form of Prayer, to be recited in the actual words which He used, but rather as a pattern or model, in accordance with which He desired that they should endeavour to frame their own petitions. For this, as I take it, is the true meaning of the command '*after this manner* pray ye.'

But on the second occasion (St. Luke xiv.) the circumstances were quite changed. Two years had gone by. During that time, doubtless, His disciples had tried long and earnestly to frame their prayers upon the Master's model. But the frailty of human nature was too much for them. Worldliness, selfishness, weariness, spiritual deadness, had all united to make them feel at times incapable of framing prayers for themselves. Discouraged and dispirited under the sense of failure, they came and asked Jesus to give them a Form of Prayer (just as John had given one to his disciples) which they could fall back upon when their hearts were dry, and their tongues refused to utter. And then, recognising their weakness, and our weakness, the Master gave them once more the very same Prayer that He had suggested two years ago; but this time, He not merely permits, but actually commands,

its use as a set Form; for He says,—'When ye pray, *say*,' &c.

In what I have to say to you in these sermons, I shall treat the Prayer solely from the first point of view. I shall ask you to consider it as the model given us, in accordance with the lines of which all our own private petitions are to be framed. I shall ask you carefully and minutely to study those lines, as an assistance in the hour of our own devotions. I shall ask you to try and master the principles upon which every one of its clauses is based, and then to compare them with the principles and motives which dictate the prayers which from time to time rise from our own hearts.

In accordance with this purpose, I shall first ask you, by way of introduction, to notice how the plan of this Prayer is intended to correct four principal defects, which only too often mar the prayers of even earnest praying people, and which are for ever bringing even Christian souls into more or less danger of that loss which St. James tells us does ever hang over such Christian and praying souls: 'Ye ask and have not, because ye ask amiss.'

I. First, then, I notice, with regard to the manner of our prayers that (if I may so express myself) we stand too much upon ceremony with God. We are not familiar enough with Him. Enoch of old 'walked with God.' Moses 'talked with God, face to face, as a man speaketh with his friend.' But there is too much

in the present modes of teaching which drags us back to old heathen notions. We treat God too much as an Oriental potentate expects to be treated by his subjects. We come before Him in an abject, prostrate, crouching, cringing, nay, even fawning, spirit.

Now, it is as an eternal protest against this spirit of slavery and cowardice that our Prayer, with a divine abruptness, leads us straight to a Father. It asserts our claims and rights as children. Recollect that it was given, not to a select few, but to the whole surrounding multitude; among whom, doubtless, was many a poor prodigal, many a publican and harlot. One and all were bidden simply to cry, 'Our Father.' Thus at the very outset of His work our Lord taught us that timidity is faithlessness; that cowardice is sin; that 'fearfulness' (Rev. xxi. 8) necessarily excludes us from the Father's presence, quite as surely as open sin can do. He teaches us that true reverence is shown best by loving, childlike boldness, and simple-hearted familiarity; and so He opens out to us that which I strongly feel to be the only true definition of prayer. Prayer is 'talking with God;' meeting Him in communion—that is, on common ground; not as though there were an immeasurable space, or an unsurmountable barrier, between us; but as child with parent, engaging in simple, tender, loving, utterly free and unfettered, and therefore most truly reverential, intercourse.

II. A second defect in the prayers of even true and

earnest Christians is, our tendency to selfishness and exclusiveness. All our cries are selfish: '*My* Father, give *me*' what I want. If we pray for others, it is distinct from, and coming after, ourselves. Here again, our Prayer enters its eternal protest against that which I shall call our tendency to religious selfishness. Its keynote is Brotherhood, as flowing out of Fatherhood. Its cry is, therefore, '*Our* Father, give *us*.' Believe me we need this lesson. We need to learn that it is sin to cry even for our own exclusive salvation. I have heard really good people argue that there is such a thing as a 'divine selfishness;' but I reply, no; a thousand times NO. Such a phrase is a contradiction in terms; quite as much so as the expression 'a loving hate' could be. Whatever is selfish is, therefore, earthly. Whatever is divine is absolutely opposed to self. And, therefore, the Lord's Prayer knows neither 'I' nor 'thou' nor 'he,' but groups all its pronouns into the Fatherly and Brotherly 'we' 'us' 'our.'

III. But there tends to be another grievous defect in all of our prayers; and this is a defect which arises out of the very inmost motives of our hearts. Everyone naturally prefers that which is easy to that which is hard. Therefore everyone always tends to look at external and visible consequences, rather than to search into underlying principles. We are content with registering effects, and care little about the causes. Hence it is that we tend to think of the consequences of wrong, rather than of the wrong itself; and the

thought of eternal woe in the hereafter takes the place in our scheme of life, which ought to be occupied by the crushing thought of present sin, now. Hence, again, our most frequent cry is for 'pardon;' a cry which too often means no more than 'Let me off the punishment which I deserve.' Hence, once more when a soul is first deeply awakened, and mistakes that awakening (as most are led to do) for true conversion, the almost invariable expression of that soul is, 'I feel I am forgiven, therefore I am happy.' And (God help us!) too much of our present religious teaching tends to foster this notion, that 'forgiveness' is the end, instead of the beginning, of Christian life and Christian hope.

Once more, the Lord's Prayer is a standing protest against this error. *Our* prayers begin with a cry for forgiveness. The model on which we are told to form our prayers puts forgiveness into a very subordinate place. Three direct petitions for various forms of personal holiness come first. Then comes a prayer for our daily needs, whether of body or soul. Then, and not till then, do we find any request for pardon; and even this we are deliberately taught to make conditional on our own readiness to forgive others. And why is this so? Because the forgiveness which *we* think so much of, only removes the guilt of the sin, but leaves the sin behind. Because it is not this forgiveness that admits us to the life of the truly blest; but that inwrought and painfully achieved personal holiness 'without which no man shall see the Lord.' Because forgiveness is the work of a

single instant, God's absolutely instantaneous answer to the true cry of repentance. This costs us but a moment's pang, a moment's struggle. It is comparatively easy, and our natural laziness would like to exalt the easiest thing into the first place. But to do God's will; to obey the laws of His kingdom; to keep ever holy His true Name of Father—this is the long work of a lifetime; this is hard and painful work, and nature shrinks from it, and would fain believe that it is of only secondary importance. And therefore, I thank God that our Master's Prayer will for ever warn us against our danger of inverting God's order in the necessary work of our Christian life.

IV. But once more, even as we have seen that our prayers for blessings, and against evils, tend to be selfish, so does our thankfulness tend to centre on mercies received by ourselves alone. We thank God because He has been good to us, not because He is good in Himself. Now, it seems to me that we do not sufficiently realise the lesson with regard to this, which is contained in the concluding doxology. We do not heed the teaching of that little word 'for' which links on the closing words to the main body of the Prayer, making them not a mere ascription of praise, but converting them into an argument. The doxology really takes us back to the first words of the prayer. The doxology teaches us that the one thought of God's loving Fatherhood must pervade the whole of our prayers, the whole of our lives. It is as though it said, 'We ask all this just because Thou art our Father, and,

therefore, hast the love and the will. We ask Thee because Thou, the Father of all, art also the King of the Universe, and therefore hast the power, as well as the will, to fulfil all the needs of all thy children.'

Yes: we return to the thought from whence we started; the thought of the first two words which our Elder Brother first taught sinful, sorrowing, struggling men and women their blessed right to use:—'Our Father.'

It is this thought which I desire to be the ever-recurring note of every paragraph in these sermons. It is this thought the setting forth of which I desire to be the hourly recognised and cherished motive of the Christian lives of myself and of all those whom I am sent to try and teach.

God grant it be so, for one and all of us!

II.

FATHERHOOD.

'Our Father.'—MATT. vi. 9.

I ASKED you, in the last sermon, to take a rapid and general glance at the Lord's Prayer as a whole; regarding its spirit and its arrangement as affording us a type or model according to which we should ever strive to frame and fashion our own private devotions. We shall now go on to analyse, sentence by sentence and, when necessary, word by word, the several thoughts which each petition brings before us.

And when we try thus to think out the significance of the opening address to 'Our Father, in Heaven,' we find such a crowd of deep, solemn, tender, and helpful thoughts arising at once in our hearts and minds, that it is impossible for me to set them before you, even in the barest outline, within the narrow limits which I am obliged to assign to myself on each occasion that I thus address you. I must ask you, then, to try and carry on the connection of these thoughts from time to time.

Especially must we dwell upon these two words, 'Our Father.' For I feel, with a depth and intensity

which I am utterly unable to put into the cold dead words, that within those two words is contained the only key which is capable of solving the deep and mysterious riddle of human life. I believe that every doubt, every puzzle, every perplexity, every question which can arise, either as to the present or to the future, either as to the life of the individual soul, or to the life and life-history of the great world, is capable of being fairly answered and set to rest, by the right comprehension of these two words;—*and by no other means whatever.* In these two words I find a rational basis for prayer. In these two words I find the sole mainspring and ultimate motive of all practical Christian life. In these two words I find the one and only thought which makes 'life worth living'; which, amid all the pains, sorrows, disappointments, and failures of our own lives, and amid all the horrors and contradictions of the world around us, can still enable us to look onward as well as upward, our minds exercising a rational belief, as well as our hearts filled with a child-like trust, that, as our sweet and true poet sings,—

> somehow good
> Will be the final goal of ill.

Nor shall I hesitate here to avow my strong conviction that the reason why we find this faith so hard to attain to is, because the belief in, and the setting forth of, the Fatherhood of God has been permitted to occupy too low and subordinate a place in the general scheme

of modern religious thought. We are in some danger of making the Person and the Work of our Blessed Lord the sole end, the terminus, so to speak, of our entire scheme of Christian theology. But this was not His own idea of His mission and work. 'No man cometh unto the Father but by me' are the words which show us what were His notions concerning His teaching. Even so, also, in the Epistle to the Hebrews, the writer lays down the main proposition which he desires to establish, as being that God, Who had revealed Himself in many different ways to the old world, had in these later days of the world's education revealed Himself as a Father, manifested to us as such through the ideal of Sonship. And yet I fear that the general tendency of religious thought and teaching nowadays is, to tempt us to stop short half-way; to contemplate, with all-absorbing love and thankfulness, the 'Truth' and the 'Life,' as revealed to us by our blessed Saviour; forgetting that this is only a portion of spiritual knowledge, and that we can only attain unto the whole in proportion as we also find in and through Him a 'Way' to the realisation of God as 'Our Father.'

I own that the more we think over this final mystery of God's Love, the more difficult does it become to grasp all its infinite depth and fulness. Yet we must not shrink from facing it fairly. We must not shrink from accepting the fact of God's Fatherhood as a substantial reality. We must not allow the name of 'Father' to dwindle down into a mere conventional

expression or fashion of speech. We must not accept it as being only a general phrase expressive of God's love and care. We must not permit it to become to us a word meaning something considerably less than that which is signified by its human counterpart. Rather let us listen to, and take into our heart of hearts, the words of Jesus, newly risen from the tomb :—'I ascend to my Father and your Father; to my God and your God.'—This was the first message of His new life to 'His brethren.' Recollect that it was not the suffering man, pent within the prison of mortal flesh, that spake these words. It was the Resurrection Christ. It was still the Son of Man, but clad in His resurrection Body, clothed upon with His House from Heaven, with His mortality merged into the fulness of the glorified Spirit Life of the forever, Who thus makes deliberate proclamation of common familyhood with His brethren still in the flesh; Who distinctly sets forth God as being our Father, even as He was His own; Who distinctly claims that Father as being His God, even as He is ours. Nor let anyone imagine, again, that His words were a mere image or form of speech. The words of Him who told us that we shall have to give account for every 'idle' word (that is, for every word which 'does not do its appointed work;' every word which is calculated to produce a wrong impression), must be accepted literally as they stand. Nor again, let anyone think that, in speaking thus, our Lord was condescending or stooping to the level of man. Not so. Rather He sets forth

to us the true platform which redeemed man has a right to claim as his own. Rather He proclaims to us the substantial reality of the relationship of Man to that Father who, as Jesus Himself tells us, 'has loved us as He has loved Himself.'

What I have called the substantial reality of this Personal Fatherhood of God appears to me to be also shadowed forth in that remarkable argument which our Lord made use of:—'If ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask Him.' The whole point of this argument lies in the assumption that the relationship which exists between God and man is something real, not merely imaginary; and that its conditions are substantially the same as those which exist between the true ideal of an earthly father and his children; with this sole difference, that the earthly father is imperfect in wisdom and in love, whereas the Father in Heaven is necessarily perfect in both.

And hence we can see how the heavenly relationship is not so named by a metaphor borrowed from our experience of earthly relationship; but rather that it is just the reverse. The earthly bond and tie is just so far a true one inasmuch as it is the shadow of the heavenly one, the 'pattern of things in the heavens.' And St. Paul seems to re-echo exactly the same thought when he tells us that it is of God that (to translate accurately Eph. iii. 15) 'every fatherhood,' that is every

circle of hearts knit together by the common bond of family ties which centre in a father,—throughout the whole universe, receives its name; thus clearly showing that earthly fatherhood is only truly such, so long, and so far as it reflects the character and the attributes of 'our Father which is in heaven.' And, if this be true, then we may also reverse this last statement, and may safely argue thus,—that whatever position a *true* earthly father occupies or assumes with regard to his children, —*exactly* the same position, in every respect, is occupied, or will be assumed, by our Father in heaven towards His children here below.

Now, this will enable us to answer the first question which must arise in respect to the right to use the words in our own prayers. We must not shut our eyes to the fact that there are whole denominations of Christians, as well as many individuals in every denomination, who, either directly or indirectly, aim at limiting this relationship of Father and child; who either deny the right of certain men and women to call God 'our Father' at all; or who teach that God is the Father of some *in a different sense* from that in which He is the Father of others. What we must ask in the first place is, how far do either of these positions bear the test of Scripture, in the fair and straightforward interpretation of its words?

We cannot answer this question better than by inquiring who those persons were who were first taught and commanded to pray 'Our Father.' Was it a

limited and chosen few who were admitted to this privilege? Or was it a band of devoted and consistent followers who were permitted to call themselves God's children? Not so. Our Lord was addressing the whole multitude when He taught this prayer; and that large numbers did actually hear and understand what He said on this occasion is amply proved by Matt. vii. 28, where we are told that 'when Jesus had ended all these sayings, *the people* were astonished at His doctrine.' Clearly, then, a considerable concourse of what we should call unconverted and unbaptized souls first received from Him the right and the authority to address God as their Father. Nor can we forget that among His own disciples there was the traitor Judas, who was in no way excluded from this same privilege. And, remembering this, we can understand St. Paul's grand protest against anything in the shape of exclusive right to this relationship being claimed by, or on behalf of, anyone, when he tells us in words which I, for one, dare not accept otherwise than in all their glorious fulness, that there is 'One God and Father *of* ALL.'

But will it be said that God is the Father of some *in a different sense* from that in which He is the Father of all?—I cannot accept this statement. Deeply impressed as I am with the solemn importance of words, I cannot palter or truckle with them in a double sense. I go back to the rule of interpretation which we have established above. As the earthly relation of father to child, so is the heavenly relationship of God to man.

A father *cannot* be more of a father to one child than he is to another. A father *cannot* be a father in one sense to one of his children, and in another sense to another. Once a father always a father. The relationship is a simple fact, which admits of no alteration, no change, no degrees of lesser or greater. The father of a rebellious, undutiful, unloving child is his father still. The man in the parable was the father of the prodigal, just as much as he was of the son who remained at home in his house. The earthly father may be compelled to chastise the child; but he remains his child still. The earthly child may insult his father, may leave his house, may cease to claim his love, may even deny his name and his relationship; but, as a simple matter of fact, so long as life lasts, he *is* his father's child still. Even so must it be in our mutual relationship to God. That relationship is a simple fact. God's Fatherhood is unalterable. We may change. We may rebel; we may abandon; nay, we may even disown, that relationship; but our Father remains the same, yesterday, to-day, and for ever; Father of saint and sinner alike; the absolutely unchangeable One.

And there is yet one other thought which flows out of this part of our subject. A true father cannot cease to love his child. Oh, the deep, mysterious, tender yearning of a father's heart over the lad who has broken that heart: the lad on whom his pride and his hopes were fixed, who has thwarted and baffled all, who has trampled his honour in the dust, who has left his

home and parents with memories that will be bitter so long as life shall last! Does the true father cease to love that son? Nay. Does he not long after him, dream of him, pray for him? Yes: he cannot help doing do. He *is* a father still.

And—oh how can tongue or pen express the solemn, the awful counterpart? How can human heart conceive the tender longing of Our Father's spirit for every rebellious wanderer? Who can conceive His craving after the love of the loveless one? Who can tell of the Love strong as Death, that loves, and loves, and still loves on, despite of coldness, forgetfulness, repulse, insult, and defiance? Who can fathom the depths of the inconceivable love of Him who has bidden every child of earth to call Him by the name of 'Our Father'?

III.

FATHERHOOD.

Our Father.'—MATT. vi. 9.

IN resuming the consideration of the principal thoughts which it is good for us to try and connect with these words, I shall only so far refer to the idea which I endeavoured to bring forward in my former sermon, as to remind you that the fundamental position which I then attempted to establish was this: that the relationship which exists between God and man, as Father and child, is not a mere figment of speech, but a real solid fact; and that the conditions of that relationship find an exact parallel, in every conceivable detail, however minute, in the conditions of mutual relationship which exist between the true type of a human father and his children; saving only that the best conceivable human father must ever have his fatherhood more or less marred by ignorance and occasional frailties, whereas Our Father in Heaven is necessarily perfect in wisdom as well as in love.

We have fully considered this parallelism in so far as relates to that inexpressibly tender love, 'strong as

death,' which a father, by the mere fact of being a father, cannot help feeling towards every one of his children, even when most ungrateful and disobedient.

We now pass on to a deeper and a more marvellous thought still. Every father has certain *duties* towards his children :—duties which, if he neglects, he thereby falls short of the true idea of fatherhood, and forfeits his claims to be spoken of as a *true* father. In accordance with our principle as laid down above, we are bound to apply this same idea to God's relationship with us.

'What!' I can fancy I hear some one exclaim—'are we to judge God?—are we to dare to say that the Infinite has duties to the finite—the Creator to the creature?' Yes; with the deepest reverence, but at the same time with a full consciousness of the meaning of the words which I employ, I repeat them with a solemn awe. Our heavenly Father has *duties* to perform towards every son of earth. In claiming for man this standpoint, I do but vindicate the position which was taken up by Abraham of old. When, pleading with God for the preservation of the righteous inhabitants of the guilty cities of the plain, he exclaimed, 'Shall not the judge of all the earth do right,'—he did *not* give utterance to an expression of pious resignation; he did not declare his willingness to acquiesce in any arbitrary act, and acknowledge it to be right, only because an almighty potentate and judge had done it; but he appeals directly to the instinctive sense of right and wrong within his own bosom. 'That the righteous

should be as the wicked, that be far from Thee.' Thou hast implanted principles of moral law and order within my heart. Thou hast taught me that it is not fair that righteous and wicked should be involved in one common doom. Thou, the Law-maker, canst not be a Law-breaker. Thou, who hast taught me what is justice, must Thyself be just. Thou, who hast taught me what is right, art Thyself as much bound by that eternal law of right as I am. Such was the true logical process in Abraham's mind, by which he rose to a sublime assertion of humanity in God's image; by which he clearly laid it down that the Father of all is bound by certain duties to His children. Nor are the words of St. John founded upon any other principle, when he tells us that 'if we confess our sins, He is faithful *and just* to forgive us our sins.' Mark those words! Human theology talks of the 'justice' of God, in connection with the exaction of punishment. The loved Apostle of the Lord prefers to see God's justice exercised in fulfilling the one condition of pardon. The Father has made a Law that every sin honestly confessed is then and there so utterly blotted out, that it 'shall never be mentioned again' to the sorrowing child. By this Law he has bound Himself under a positive condition. Could He hear one penitent cry, and defer forgiveness for a single instant, He would cease to be just; He would cease to be a Father; cease to be a God at all. It is our Father's *duty* to forgive, provided only that the condition of hearty penitence be forthcoming.

Once more—it is a father's duty to care for his children's sustenance. Even so we may say that it is our Father's duty to provide for all our needs as spiritual beings, and that He has done so abundantly. A father works for, watches over, his children; and takes thought not only for their immediate or daily wants, but also for future contingencies. He 'provides'—that is to say, according to the true meaning of that word—he 'looks ahead' for them. Even so does our heavenly Father act as a 'provider' for us. There is a wonderful expression in St. Peter, the true depth of which is sadly lost sight of in our inadequate translation. 'Casting all your anxiety upon Him,' wrote the Apostle, 'for He is ever busying Himself over you.' 'Ever busying Himself over us'!—What a thought is here! The High and Lofty One that inhabiteth immensity personally busying Himself about each one of His children; affected by their emotions; suffering with their sorrows; rejoicing in their joys; watching their paths; making all things work together for their ultimate good; overruling even evil, error, disobedience, and making them His agents in the child's education; for ever planning, devising, influencing; for ever 'busied,' as a Father, for the true welfare of every child.

For—and here naturally flows on the next thought—it is a father's *duty* to educate his child. Does any parent now neglect that duty; does any parent neglect to send his child to school; does any parent fail to

enforce the child's remaining at the school until it has learned all that is necessary to qualify it for its future life as a grown-up man or woman? Then, so far as this point is concerned, that parent is undeserving of the sacred name of father. We know that this is the case, so far as regards earthly fatherhood. Then, by our argument, it *must* also be the case with regard to our Father in Heaven.

And indeed so it is. I love to think, to speak, of this earth as being God's great school for us, His growing-up children. Here He places us, where we have lessons to learn, which will fit us to go out into Life. We complain often of the hardships of this life. Of course there are hardships. What school would be worth having where the masters only set the boys easy lessons, and took no notice if the lessons were imperfectly learned? It is the very essence of school-time that the lessons should be hard. It is the very essence of school-time that lessons should gradually increase in hardness. It is the very essence of school-time that lessons inaccurately learned should be turned back, if necessary again and again, until they are thoroughly mastered. So it is with our Father here on earth. He is, emphatically, the Educator. And here is one of those keys of which I have spoken before, which will solve the complicated riddles of human life. When we look at the toil and tears, the struggles and suffering, which mingle with our own individual lives; and all the pains and agonies which mark the gradual upward progress

of the great world-life; we find them utterly, cruelly inexplicable, so long as we view them by themselves. But oh how different is the aspect they wear when we can look upon them as being the hard but needful lessons whereby, in accordance with His 'eternal purpose' (or 'plan of the ages' as it should be rendered), an Educating Father is doing all He can to raise each individual child, and the great collective mass of His children, to that true perfection which easy-going, pleasant laziness can never attain to, but which may be reached by those who will follow the Father's plan, and allow themselves to be 'made perfect through sufferings.'

And now, what does a father seek—what does a father expect—in return for all his care, foresight, anxiety, education?

He looks for no material recompense. His children can never repay him, and he knows it. His work for them is absolutely unselfish; absolutely irrespective of any possibilities in the future. He looks for but one thing; and that is, the one word, Love. In this one word all is summed up. Filial respect and reverence; intelligent (not slavish) obedience; all these, and everything else that a father's heart can desire, are summed up in the one word love. So far as it is possible for the child's intellect to receive and understand the reason of a command, the wise father will ever try to ensure an intelligent obedience by explaining the command. If occasion arise to enforce submission to some requirement, the reason for which the

child is not yet old enough to understand, the father must then appeal to the child's passive obedience on trust; telling it that what he does it cannot know now, but it shall know some future day, when it is grown a little older. But, above all, the father looks for and delights in free, unrestrained, familiar intercourse with his child. Here is the full sweetness of the true tie of family union. This is the central pivot on which turns the whole machine of true family life.

Even so, once more, is it with us and our Father. Having done all for us, He asks for nothing but our love in return. If His dealings with us seem hard (as they often do), He invites us to question Him about them. 'Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord,' is a message which distinctly encourages us to the full exercise of our reasoning powers upon spiritual matters. God does not require blind, irrational, passive compliance, as some would fain turn us away from Him by persuading us that He does. So far as our intellect is capable of going, fairly and logically, so far does He bid us 'reason' with Him. When intellect and reason fail, because the child at school is not yet far enough advanced to comprehend, He says, 'My child, so far as you have followed my plan, you have found me true and loving. Now that you can see no farther, trust that Truth and that Love for a short time; and before long this also shall be revealed unto you, when you are a little older and wiser.' And, above all, does our Father long to see us 'coming boldly' to him:

We are far too ceremonious with God. We fancy we must enter His presence with awe and severe solemnity, as we would enter the court of an earthly sovereign, hedged round with the strictest rules of etiquette. But it is not so. All the time that we are thus timidly crouching, our Father is only longing for us to run freely, familiarly, childlikely, and lovingly into His presence, throw ourselves into His fatherly arms, lay down our heads on His fatherly bosom, and there prattle away, openly and unrestrainedly, of all our little every-day joys and sorrows, hopes and fears, difficulties, failures, and successes. Think how it would grieve a true earthly father to see some child of his shunning his presence, or coming into his room with awestruck gestures, and half-bated voice, scarce venturing to put forward, in ceremonious words, some ordinary request! Would not the father say, 'My child, what have I done to you that you should treat me thus?' And if the child replied, 'They told me you would be angry unless I behaved in this manner,' would he not rejoin, 'Oh, child, never mind what they tell you of me. Those who know me not may tell you many hard things; but listen not to them. Remember that I am your father, and love you; and never treat me thus again!' And yet I fear that this is too often the way even with those who do desire to love and obey their heavenly Father. I fear that we all of us too often grieve our Father by listening to what well-meaning, but mistaken, persons who know not who and what He is, are very ready to

tell us of Him. Oh, believe me, God longs for the full gush of the child's heart—nothing more. It grieves Him, it wounds Him when any child proffers a ceremonious, formal, cold, and stiff obedience. He longs for us, He craves for us, He yearns for us, to return to Him the same free, full, unrestrained affection which His heart feels for each and all of us. Our Father says to one and all, 'My son! give me thine heart.' More He does not desire. Less He cannot accept.

IV.

BROTHERHOOD.

'OUR Father.'—MATT. vi. 9.

IN the last two sermons I have endeavoured to bring before you some of the principal thoughts which flow out of the idea of God as *Our* FATHER. It still remains, however, that I should ask you to ponder over the full force of the first of these two words, and try to understand what is involved by speaking to God as 'OUR' Father.

It seems to me (to express the difference of the two sets of ideas as briefly as possible) that while the second of these two words warns us of the danger there is of shutting ourselves out from the true knowledge of God, because we lack the true child's heart, the first equally warns us that we are in danger of failing to know God of a truth, from the lack of a *brother's* heart. Our first lesson is that God is a Father; the second, that He is an All-Father; that His Fatherhood is a fact in which others, without any limit perceptible to us, have an equal share with ourselves.

Speaking generally, we cannot help recognising the fact, that the one great and first motive of all life is, Self. Right or wrong, the fact is so. In the first place, no doubt, this motive is based upon our strong and natural sense of personal individuality. Personal wants, personal joys, personal sufferings, exercise the first claim upon us. Why, the very word 'man' is identical, in its root and original meaning, with the pronouns 'me' and 'mine'! Up to a certain point, this motive is an absolutely necessary one, and involves nothing sinful or contrary to God's Fatherhood. But, when it passes that point, when it becomes isolation, which ignores the existence of others, and acts upon the principle of 'every man for himself and himself alone'—then it is sinful. Or again, when it drifts into any species of arrogance and exclusiveness, whether social or religious (and religious isolation, arrogance, and selfishness is at least as common as any other) —then, again, it becomes sinful, and necessarily shuts us out from knowing and loving God, as revealed in Fatherhood, exactly in proportion as we shut ourselves out from knowing and loving the men and women around us, as connected with us by the sacred tie of Brotherhood.

For each and all of these possible errors the word which we consider to-day affords a practical remedy. Against each and all of these sins of selfishness, so common, so little thought of, so often made excuses for,

this word gives us a solemn warning. And, thank God, despite of each and all of these, and every other form of the Self-principle of our hearts, this word stands, and shall stand for evermore, not only as a warning for the present, but as a pledge for the future; telling us that that fraternity after which the human heart is ever yearning, which it has sought to attain by many fantastic, impracticable, even terrible, means, is not a vague dream never to be accomplished, but shall some day be effectually brought about, and that by the *only* power that is capable of doing so—namely, by a practical realisation of God's Fatherhood resulting in a practical realisation of man's Brotherhood.

Meantime, this first word of the Lord's Prayer will stand as an eternal protest against selfishness, isolation, and exclusiveness of every kind. Take, in the first place, our purely social relationships. Much has been said of late years about Political Economy. I fearlessly assert that Political Economy, from first to last, is nothing more than a practical working out of the meaning of this one word. Political Economy teaches us that the wealth and happiness of a nation depend upon the proportionate distribution of labour, wages, and the means of purchasing throughout all classes and professions of the community. Each class, each household, each individual, tends to live for itself alone. Its cry is 'Give *me*.' Political Economy steps in and says, 'If your cry could be realised, national ruin and misery would

be the result. Class and class are, as a matter of fact, bound together by natural laws of mutual interaction. The wealth of one reacts in producing the wealth of all. The suffering, ignorance, disease of one equally reacts in producing loss, of some kind or another, to all. Your cry must not be "Give *me*," but "Give *us*."'

Yes; and so it ever will be. There is not a single social truth that man's wit can discover and elaborate, but we shall find it somewhere briefly formulated for us, long centuries ago, by the lips of Him who spake as never man spake. Nay, there is not a single social truth, the whole essence and innermost teaching of which has not been already anticipated, and is not summed up and concentrated, in the one word which specially occupies our thoughts to-day:—'OUR' Father.

But, further,—as in social life, merely as men and women who have to maintain a struggle for existence in the great world-strife, so also in spiritual life, in the inner struggle that goes on in each one's individual heart, do we need to realise more and more the teachings of this same word.

For, if social selfishness be rife, and hard to escape from, much more is what we must call religious selfishness rife, and hard not to be entangled with. As I remarked in the introductory sermon of this course, our very prayers are selfish. We cry, 'Pardon *me*;' 'give *me*;' 'deliver *me*;' 'O *my* Father'! Neither does this habit of speech flow out of any intense personal conviction of our own individual share in God's Fatherhood.

It is *not* the earnest response, 'My Father, Thou art the guide of my youth.' As a mere matter of fact, those who best realise their personal share in this Father, are the least ready to mar their petitions with the formulas of Self. And yet I have heard a man actually preach, in so many words, that there is such a thing as 'Religious Selfishness,' and that it is a necessary and laudable thing! Away with such libels upon God! If 'Religion' means a cunningly devised scheme whereby men and women may live unholy lives and yet die the same death as those who have tried to live holily, then I will admit that such a thing as 'religious selfishness' does, and must, exist; but I shall also claim that it forms one of the most unholy aggravations of lives already unholy. But if 'Religion' means an earnest striving to become acquainted with a Father, and to try and live as we feel that this Father longs to see His children living—(as I believe it does)—then, most assuredly, such a phrase as 'Religious Selfishness' is just as much a contradiction in terms, as it would be to speak of 'red-hot frost,' or of a 'dazzling gloom.'

And may not we recognise this same tendency towards isolating ourselves, rather than towards individualising God, in the very way in which we pray for others? We pray for them as separate and distinct from ourselves, not as forming a great Unity in which we and they have equal shares. Even if we can attain to recognising God as being '*their*' Father, as well as our own—how rarely do we, in heart and soul,

combine both them and ourselves, their wants and ours, their interests and ours, their salvation and ours, under one term, and simply ask '*Our*' Father to bless and teach '*us*.'

And (again I thank God that I can say it!) this word is an eternal protest against every form of bigotry. The opponents of Christianity of the present day bring it forward as one of their objections that Christianity has ever been a persecuting religion. Yes; the Christianity that *man* has taught has been a persecuting religion; but Christianity as Christ taught it *cannot* be such. Individual Christians and Christian churches have been and still are persecutors; but Christianity is not. Individuals, living as individuals, say, 'I have found out *My* Father. *My* opinions about Him are true. Therefore those who do not hold those opinions are wrong. Therefore *I* must set them right at any cost, even by using violence, if in no other way.'—This is the simple argument upon which all religious bigotry, all denominational or party spirit between sects and churches, is based. It is the arrogant and purely selfish assertion of some exclusive property in the possession of God. It exists within our hearts just in proportion as we are ignorant that God is a Father. It will be utterly destroyed within our hearts just in proportion as we have further learned that God is 'OUR' Father.

For the comprehending of this word is death to all religious pride and exclusiveness. When we find out that we do not gain a Father, in consequence of

becoming His children, but that it was the already existing fact of His fatherhood which enabled us to discover that we had been His children all along—then, but not till then, can we go on to recognise *all* as being His children, too! Then, too, can we contentedly leave it to His eternal wisdom to choose *how* he will educate each to the knowledge of Himself; *how* He will lead the dark-skinned heathen child of foreign lands, and the white-skinned heathen child of so-called civilised lands, all equally loved, all equally longed for, all equally sought after by Himself, along the way that is best suited for each, although it may be 'by paths which *we* know not.'

And thus we can further catch just one glimpse of something yet to be. I spoke of this word '*Our*' Father, as being at once a motive for the present, and a pledge for the future. Do not our Lord's words (John v. 17) ring out clear and crisp along the avenues of the centuries past and to come:—'My Father is at work up to the present moment; and I also am at work!' Thank God, again, for those words. Our Father has not left His world-school to take care of itself. In a silence through which the childlike ear can still catch some whispers; in a darkness through which the childlike eye can still catch here and there some gleam of light, the Father and the Brother have been working up to this very day, and are working still, to teach the children the true lesson of Fatherhood and Brotherhood. In the realisation of the Fatherhood

one-half of the instincts and cravings of the human heart can find rest. In the realisation of the Brotherhood, as revealed to us 'in a Son,' the other half of man's weary searchings and gropings may find their uttermost fulfilment and satisfaction.

Grand, glorious, ineffable, are the thoughts which thus open out to us. Shall it be so, in very deed? Shall the day ever come when 'all shall know Him, from the least unto the greatest;' know Him as what He really is, instead of what men have libelled Him as being? Yes: it shall be so. A world that has learned the meaning of '*Our*' Father shall there yet be. There is no craving of the human heart but somewhere or somewhen the means can be found for satisfying it. I know not how. I know not when. I care not to know either how or when. I am content to leave it all to Our Father to bring about, as, how, and when He sees fit. But full well do I know that that day *shall* sooner or later come! Full well do I know that it is in your power and mine either to help or to hinder the coming of that day. God, in His dear love, help those poor souls who, in their ignorance, are hindering it! God, in His dear love, help you and me to speed it!

V.

HEAVEN.

'Our Father, which art in Heaven.'—MATT. vi. 9.

THERE is yet one more thought in connection with the opening address to God, in this prayer, which is very necessary for us earnestly to ponder over. We speak of our Father as being 'in heaven.' Now, what do we mean by this description of Him?—Probably we have never really thought about the matter. Probably we have taken for granted that everybody knows what it means, and that we need not trouble ourselves to analyse and define the expression. And yet I feel, very deeply indeed, that there are few words less understood, and more misunderstood, than this one, so common, so familiar,—'Heaven.'

I speak as I do now with an intense, nay, even an awful, sense of the responsibility which I undertake. I want to rouse up my hearers to a deeper and a truer understanding of what 'Heaven' *really* means, than, perhaps, they have as yet attained to. I know that in what I have to say I shall speak what will appear new and strange to many. And yet 'necessity is laid upon

me,' and I must speak it; for I know that unless we clearly understand what 'Heaven' means, we shall never be able clearly to understand what 'Our Father' means.

I cannot enter upon this great subject at length, or discuss it fully, in a single sermon. Some future day, perhaps, if God sees fit to permit it, I may ask you to try and follow me, in a series of sermons specially devoted to setting forth the real teachings of the Bible as to the true nature of the unseen life. At the present time, I can only give you a very brief sketch of a portion of the argument.

There are three questions which the heart of man, in its searchings after the unknown and the unseen, cannot help asking. Those questions are, WHAT, WHERE, and WHEN, is Heaven? And the answer which ninety-nine Christians out of a hundred would unhesitatingly make to these questions would be, 'Heaven is a beautiful place, far off beyond the sky, where the spirits of the just enjoy happiness after this life's weary strife is over.'

Now, I believe this answer to be untrue, in every one of the three replies which it gives to the threefold question. Let us take each point separately.

I. WHAT is Heaven? I think we may safely assume one thing; (and it is the only assumption which I shall ask to be allowed to make). I assume that in the Bible 'Salvation' and 'Eternal Life,' are phrases which describe the life of Heaven, and may be

taken as meaning the same thing as Heaven itself. A soul that is in possession of eternal life is therefore a soul in Heaven. But the Bible everywhere teaches us that salvation is a state of heart and mind, in which that heart and mind is for ever becoming more and more healthy. Jesus Christ Himself tells us what 'Eternal Life' is. 'This is life eternal,' He exclaims, 'that they might know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent.' Eternal Life, then, is not seeing sweet sights, and hearing sweet sounds. Eternal Life is not a Paradise of unearthly beauty. Eternal Life is the knowledge of God. Nothing more; nothing less. Salvation is the knowledge of God. Heaven is the knowledge of God.

So, again, we are told that there 'remaineth a *rest* for the people of God.' That word 'rest' does not mean lying still and doing nothing. The original word signifies a 'Sabbath-keeping,' and it has reference to God's Sabbath Rest, when the world was planned and shaped. But God is not unemployed. He does not sit for ever on a glorious throne, contemplating His own perfections as some would have us believe. No; He works. 'My Father worketh hitherto, and I work,' tells us what God's notion of Heaven is. Not idleness, but 'work without weariness.' That is God's Sabbath-keeping. And the children shall be occupied as the Father; so that a like Rest will make the true heaven of every true child.

But Eternal Life, and Salvation, and knowledge,

and the rest which comes from ever-welcome and ever-loving work,—these are all states of heart and mind. Therefore, when I am asked, *What* is Heaven? I reply at once, It is not the name of a *place* at all. It is the name given to a certain *state* of heart and mind.

II. WHEN is Heaven? The answer to this question will naturally flow out of the thoughts we have just been dwelling upon. Salvation is a state of heart which begins here, and goes on steadily increasing as long as we live; that is to say, it is a continuous state, and goes on increasing for ever. Knowledge, too, must, in the very nature of things, be gradual. It must begin here. It may increase, year by year, here. And when our spirits are freed from the body, with all its aches and pains and weaknesses, who can tell how much or how fast it may further increase? But it is not one salvation now, and another hereafter. It is not one knowledge this moment, and a totally different knowledge the next. The Salvation, the knowledge, the Eternal Life, of the unseen life grows out of that which we have gained during the visible life, even as the blade grows out of the seed, and the flower out of the stem. There is no real break in man's life. Life is one grand unbroken chain of thoughts from its very commencement. What we call death is not the opposite of life. It does not end life. It is simply taking off one suit of clothes and putting on another. If a man changes his coat he does not become a different man. Death is no more than taking off a coat which our friends can see,

and putting on one which they cannot see. Exactly the same stock of light, knowledge, Salvation, Eternal Life, heaven, that we have in our hearts when we put off our visible coat, exactly the same shall we continue to have, when we first put on the coat which makes us invisible to earthly friends. That is to say, the heaven of the unseen world is but a continuation of a heaven already begun in the visible world. Jesus Himself tells us so. 'He that believeth on Me HATH (not *shall have*) Eternal Life.' His apostles echo on the truth. 'These things have I written unto you that believe on the Name of the Son of God, that ye may know that ye HAVE (again not *shall have*) Eternal Life.' I cannot resist the argument of these plain words; and therefore once more, if anyone asks me WHEN is Heaven? in God's name I must reply, Not hereafter only, but, above all NOW. Heaven is not a future place, but a present state.

III. WHERE is Heaven? I think that the replies which have already been given will lead us to anticipate the answer which must be accorded to this question also. If Heaven be, in part at all events, a present state, it must be a state which exists here, on this earth. As a state of heart and mind, it is utterly independent of place. It is a contradiction in terms to attempt to confine it to any one place. Wherever that state of heart is felt, there is Heaven. Wherever God and Christ are known—*personally* known, that is—there is Heaven. In proportion as that knowledge

is small, so is there a lesser degree of Heaven in the heart. In proportion as that knowledge increases, so do we find out more and more that we are, even here, in Heaven. When we drop our earthly clothing, and see face to face Him whom having not seen we still have loved, I believe that our first lesson will be, not that we have now at last entered into Heaven, but that we have been all along living in the midst of Heaven, only our mortal eyes were holden, so that we could not recognise the truth before.

The Lord Jesus Christ fully recognised all through His earthly life, that He was in Heaven. Does He not say (John iii. 13) at the very outset of His ministry, that He, the Son of Man, '*is*' in Heaven? Does He not pray, at the close of His ministry, that all those who should believe on Him, might be with Him, 'where I *am*'? (John xvii. 24). Yes, in that obscure upper chamber in Jerusalem, with Gethsemane and Calvary only a few hours distant, the Lord Jesus spoke of Himself as being actually then and there *in Heaven.* How can we resist the force of such words as these? If Heaven had been a place to be entered after life is over, how could He have spoken as He did? But if Heaven be a state of heart, in which the presence of Our Father is recognised and known, then, indeed, He was truly 'in Heaven,' for He lived ever in the consciousness of His Father's presence.

If, then, the question be put, *where* is Heaven? I once more answer unhesitatingly, Heaven has no fixed

whereabouts. Heaven is the individual heart. So long as our spirit knows and is in communion with Our Father, it matters not where in the universe we may be. We carry Heaven along with us, by carrying God along with us.

To sum up, then, our argument, and at the same time to contrast it with the current notions on this subject, let us say:

Heaven is *not* a far-off place into which people may enter after they are dead.

Heaven *is* a present state of heart, which people may enter into now, in this life, and here, even on this earth.

And now, only see what a glorious light this throws upon the true meaning of our address to Our Father as being 'in Heaven.' We have learned to look upon Him as a Father of all, in whom we can find not only the true ideal of Fatherhood, but also the true ideal of Brotherhood. We see now that this Father is one who is not removed to an inconceivable distance from us, far, far away, in some glorious central spot of unknown space. We see Him as a Father close to us, close to all of His children. We catch a glimpse now of what David meant, when he tells us that he was able to see the Lord always before him, at his right hand. We catch another glimpse of what Paul meant, when he told the Athenians that the true God and Father of all was not far from any one of us. Everywhere throughout the Bible, if we will but read it in this new light,

shall we find that the holy men of old had learned the lesson of a God near, and not far off. Everywhere shall we find encouragements to drop the old heathen notions of a far-off Heaven, and to cling ever closer and closer to the truth revealed by Christ Jesus, of a Heaven here and now, in union with a Father here and now.

I repeat it;—the notion of a far-off heaven beyond the sky is one of the heirlooms of heathendom. It is marvellous to see how slow to die are all old hereditary faiths. Our ancestors, thousands of years ago, believed in a sky-God. And this faith of theirs, filtered through a hundred generations of Christian and other teaching, still survives in our worship, in our ritual, in our common conversation, in a thousand little-dreamed-of fragments. But it is time that these relics of heathendom should be put away. God grant that we may, at all events, be able to put away this one, and, whenever we pray to 'our Father which art in heaven,' may remember that it means, 'Our Father which even now art in my heart, if only that heart is honestly and earnestly seeking to know Thee as Thou art.'

I said that it is necessary for our hearts clearly to understand the true nature of Heaven, before we can fully realise the whole truth concerning God's Fatherhood. Is it not so? So long as we think of Heaven as a far-away place, so long shall we ever drift away into thinking of God as dwelling in unapproachable Light; and He will be to us only a dream of glory, a dazzling radiance, a distant vision a 'Being,' a Centre

of Power, a picture of ideal Perfections. But once realise the possibility of an immediate present Heaven, and God can become to us, not an impersonal 'Being,' but a personal Father; ever at our right hand to talk to, ever ready to talk back again to us; ever ready to hold the hand of the child that will only permit Him to do so, and to lead that child safely through the sorrows and burdens of the things that are seen, until the earth's clothing of our bodies, and the earthly scales of our eyes, drop off at once, and we stand face to face with the all-surrounding world that at present is unseen.

'We which have believed' in God's Fatherhood thus manifested, not '*shall*' at some future day, but '*do*,' even here and now, 'enter into rest.' This faith *is* capable of giving to the weary doubting heart a 'rest,' a calm trustfulness, which no other form either of religious or of philosophical creed can do. Even as a young child lays itself down on the arm of a loving father, and drops its head on his shoulder and, tired, falls asleep, without one care to ruffle its little breast or one doubt to wrinkle its little brow, even so can the childlike heart which has learned *thus* to have faith in a Father 'in heaven' lay itself down on that Father's bosom, leaving all to Him; knowing that the alternations of joy and sorrow, sickness and health, possession and loss, are all alike the Father's will and the Father's lessons, and, as such, desiring nothing else than what He desires. In such a heart there is 'rest,' because

God is known and recognised as what He is in very deed and truth. In such a heart, prayer ceases to be the mere selfish cries of pain and want, and becomes the pure communion of soul and soul. In such a heart no shade of fear will chill and freeze the tender blade of love, but perfect childlike love has cast out all unchildlike fear.

In a word, dear friends;—do you long for the joys of Heaven? I know you do. What heart does not do so?

Then, my message to you to-day is this:—Believe in 'our Father *in Heaven*,' and by virtue of that very faith do you even here and now obtain entrance into the Heaven you long for.

VI.

OUR FATHER'S NAME.

'Hallowed be Thy Name.'—MATT. vi. 9.

IT seems to me that there is one great lesson, as to the true spirit of prayer, which has been forcibly brought before us by all the thoughts which we have been endeavouring to work out, in connection with the opening address in the Lord's Prayer. That lesson is, that true prayer is only possible, when it is offered by a child to a Father, and also in conscious recollection of those ties of eternal familyhood which unite the child's own interests with those of its brothers and sisters. In proportion as we realise the truth of a personal Father, who is the Father of all, so will our prayers be true prayers, and, by the reaction of spiritual dynamics, will they be made to help in working out their own fulfilment. In proportion as we fail to realise the truth of God's Personal Fatherhood, or as we are content with the selfish appropriation of that truth to our individual lives alone, so will our prayers fall short of being *true* prayers, and so, also, will they fail to set in motion those laws of spiritual action and reaction which are capable of bringing about the answers which we desire.

If this be the first great lesson to be learned from a careful and detailed study of the opening words of this prayer, I think that the second principal lesson is intended to teach us the relative importance of the various things which we have to pray for. And it is very necessary that we should understand this clearly, that we may know how to assign their due prominence to the different classes of wants, both of our bodily and of our spiritual lives. Some poor soul, sorely oppressed by temporal needs, sorrows, or losses, might feel inclined to cry, before anything else, 'Give us this day our daily bread.' On the other hand, many good Christians may, and do, feel inclined to make a petition for the pardon of their sins take precedence of all other wants and, as the first wish of their hearts, would cry, 'Forgive us our trespasses!' I believe, however, that the order of petitions in the Lord's Prayer is intended to teach us that both these classes of praying people are equally in the wrong. The needs of both are fully recognised, and fully provided for, in their right place; but both are postponed until other, and more needful wants have been expressed.

No. So far as I can catch the connection of ideas that was in our dear Lord's mind, when He taught this prayer, it was this: Having acknowledged ourselves to be our Father's children, let us before anything else go on to pray that we may never forget this, and that we may live like His children.

This, I believe, is the real object and intention of the

first three petitions of this Prayer :—'Hallowed be Thy name'—'Thy kingdom come'—'Thy will be done.' As practical prayers for our own growth in childlikeness, these petitions are far too little understood. They have been treated as ascriptions of a devotional spirit; as petitions for God's glory; as pious ejaculations, to be poured forth before the real work of supplication commences; as meek and submissive recognitions of His absolute and unconditional sovereignty.

I do not believe that our Lord intended them to be understood in any of these ways. The mistake of all these modes of interpretation is, that they treat God's glory, and our own personal welfare, as two distinct things. Not so. The interests, the welfare, the perfect happiness, of both Father and children are one and the same. Each involves the other. God's glory cannot be perfect, God's kingdom cannot be established, God's will cannot be done—nay, I will, with all reverence, say that God's own happiness cannot be absolutely complete, so long as a single child of His is living otherwise than as a child. His will is, that His glory shall be set forth, His Name be hallowed, His kingdom be hastened, His will be done, in and by His children living like His children. Thus the two ideas of God's glory and man's personal godliness, are not two things, but one thing; the obverse and reverse of a single coin; so inseparably and unchangeably united that we cannot think of the one, or ask for the one, without at the same time desiring and asking for the other—

And, therefore, the very first thing that we ask both for our own sakes and for the sake of our Father, is that we may be enabled to 'hallow,' that is, to treat with a holy love and fear,—His 'Name.'

What, then, we ask, is this 'Name' of God, that we are taught, before everything else, to desire that we may know, and treat with that love which alone is capable of 'hallowing' anything.

Long centuries ago, when the world was still young, very young, in its knowledge of God, He revealed Himself to Moses by the name of the great 'I AM;' the Jehovah; the self-existent One. Such a revelation, such a Name, was needed by the infant world then. But this is not the Name by which God reveals himself to us, His growing-up children, in these days. God who in many different ways, and from many different points of view, revealed Himself to the whole world, by many a true-hearted soul that spoke on His behalf, hath, in these later times, made Himself known as Our Father, by the setting forth to us of the true ideal of Sonship. As Our Father's children, we may use to Him the same Name as His dear Son Jesus did. Jesus Himself gave us the authority so to do, when He spoke of 'My Father and your Father, My God and your God;' words in which He does not condescend to us, but rather lifts us up to His own platform; words in which He shows us how we may come to the Father through Him, claiming Him as one who is equally and alike the Father of both parties; claiming Him as one whom we, equally with Jesus, are

entitled to know and to address by the Name which Jesus Himself used,—the softest, sweetest, tenderest old Hebrew Name of '*Abba*.'

Yes; *this* is the true Name of God—the word which tells of infancy's loving lips first trying to lisp the name in whose strong love the little one instinctively finds rest; the Name which the Man of men breathed forth as His last dying trust,—'Abba, into Thy hands do I commend My spirit.' This is the Name which St. Paul tells us (Rom. viii. 15) that God's own Spirit prompts our poor, sad, perplexed hearts to use. This is the name which Jesus Himself lived and died to set forth to the world, as He Himself tells us, 'And I have declared unto them Thy Name; and will declare it; that the Love wherewith Thou hast loved Me may be in them, and I in them.'

If we, as souls desirous of knowing God, and growing more and more godly (that is, as the word means, *Godlike*), are to pray in true earnestness for the attainment of this desire, and are to receive any true answer to our prayers, we can do it, and we can only do it, by the hallowing of this most tender, most precious, Name of 'Abba'—'Father!' Herein, I once more repeat it, lies the root, the fountain, the mainspring of all true Christian Life; for herein does Love become a possibility, and only in Love does Life consist.

And if we once really know God's Name to be what it is, we cannot help 'hallowing' it. Father: mother: daughter: son: parent: child—are not these indeed

hallowed, holy names? Wherever true fatherhood exists, wherever family ties are recognised, wherever the true spirit of the child is drawn out and cultivated, there the Name of Father *is* a hallowed name. And this is exactly what God wants from us. This is exactly the spirit which we pray, in this petition, may grow in us. We do not need to invest the Name of God with any mysterious or awful reverence. We do not need to breathe it with any mixture of fear or dread. It is childlike love alone that is wanted; the love that casts out all fear. To know our Father's Name *is* to love Him. To be in the least afraid of, or ceremonious with, Him, is to fall short of knowing, and, therefore of hallowing, His true Name.

I think, then, that we shall best 'hallow His Name' by treasuring up this Name of Father, as the most precious jewel of our heart's life; by clinging to it as the one standard of reference to which all self-styled truth and doctrine is to be referred; and, above all, by regarding it as the one keynote into which all the apparently jarring discords of our own lives, or of the history of the great world around us, may be, and shall sooner or later be, resolved. When doctrines are brought to us, and carefully defended, as set forth in God's word,—let us first test them by this thought:—Is their asserted truth consistent with God's absolute and universal Fatherhood? If so, we may accept them. If not, then, however plausibly they may be defended, by appeals to antiquity, or by references to isolated passages of Scrip-

ture, we are bound to reject them, as something that will tend to make us come short of hallowing our Father's Name. If the crosses and losses of our own personal lives, or if the horrors that so often shock us in the world's history, incline us to magnify the present pain and the individual loss, let us still whisper, 'Our Father,' and strive to look on, as He does, through the education to the end thereof; through the present pain to the future cure of the disease the locality of which was pointed out by the pain; through the momentary loss to the never-ending gain which shall ultimately spring out of the loss; and thus, reaching forth 'lame hands of faith' to 'grasp the far-off interest of tears,' let us once more hallow 'Our Father's Name,' whilst from the bottom of broken or perplexed hearts we still cling to the certainty that, in His perfect Love and perfect wisdom, that Father 'hath done all things well.'

Let us see to it, also, that we hallow that dear Name by claiming no private, exclusive, or even special, property in it. Let us freely acknowledge that it is the equal right of *all* our brothers and sisters, even though neither their opinions nor their actions may be exactly such as we ourselves would hold or practise. Perhaps they have some wrong notions: perhaps ours are not altogether right. Perhaps we should not have acted as they have done: perhaps had we been *exactly* in *their* circumstances, we should have done worse. At all events, both they and we are 'children of one Father,' and He who gave each child its own individual lessons,

alone can tell how far it has honestly tried to learn them. Let us hallow our Father's Name by believing this much of Him as well as of ourselves and of others.

Let us hallow His Name, too, in our daily lives, by letting others see that we do know and love it. Even among Christian people, and between Christian friends there is too much shrinking back from naming the name of God. It may be from a spirit of fancied delicacy and reverence, but it is a mistake. By such imaginary delicacy and reverence, we actually do dishonour to the very Name which we really prize. A child among children prattles with a loving familiarity about its father at home. So should we. I repeat the expression. We should talk about God, (not as 'Providence' or by some such periphrasis,) with a *loving familiarity*; dwelling upon His Name as something very full of tender thought to us; and so once more, should we grow, more and more, to receive the fulfilment of our prayers, and to learn more and more of what a Father's Name implies.

Thus, then, we can perceive the truth of what I said at first,—that this petition is essentially a cry for our own growth in personal holiness.

It is so with regard to our own inner lives; what we may call the passive or contemplative side of our spiritual being. A child shows true reverence to its parent by quiet, loving acquiescence in the father's will; asking all reasonable questions, but resting satisfied when it only receives the assurance that it is not yet old enough to understand the reasons for certain things. It loves;

therefore it trusts. The name of Father is sufficient for it. In its quiet love and unfretful trust, it hallows that name.

So may we,—so must we,—with Our Father in Heaven.

Once more, with regard to our outer lives, the active and practical workaday existence which we have to carry on in this oftentimes so hard world-school of our Father's. A child hallows its father's name by active obedience as well as by passive acquiescence. 'Son, go *work* to-day, in my vineyard,' is the Father's word which echoes on to us. By doing our daily work, as each day brings its own homely and familiar task to our hands, and by doing it, however small or lowly, or inconspicuous it may be, just simply for our Father's sake, shall we, like Enoch of old, 'walk with God.' Like a child holding its father's hand, following him wherever he leads, talking lovingly and familiarly to him of all its joys and griefs, and wonders, and discoveries, and ignorances; and ever and again looking up into His face, to drink in the gladness of the loving interchange of smile and smile:—so may we learn to live in the conscious realisation of our Father's Presence.

God help us all to learn that this personal communion of heart and heart is the true outcome of what we pray for when we say, 'Hallowed be Thy Name.'

VII.

OUR FATHER'S KINGDOM.

'Thy kingdom come.'—MATT. vi. 10.

BEFORE we can learn to pray these words 'with our understanding,' as well as with our lips and hearts, it is necessary, in the first place, that we should thoroughly comprehend what I tried to explain in the last sermon, namely, that we are intended to accept the three first petitions of the Lord's Prayer as being, first and above all else, prayers for our own growth in personal holiness.

Next, with regard to the petition which comes before us for consideration to-day, we must make sure that we have a clear understanding as to what the Bible means when it speaks of God's 'kingdom.' Full as the New Testament is, full as our Lord's own words are, of references to the 'kingdom of God,' and the 'kingdom of Heaven,' I believe that most Christian people are content to take for granted that they know all that need be known about these expressions, and so rest satisfied with vague, dim notions that they refer to some grand and glorious hereafter, the exact nature of which no one can define. And hence it is that this petition is rarely

recognised as one with which every one of us has a deep and immediate personal interest.

For just as I warned you, in a former sermon, was our danger with regard to 'heaven,' such also is our danger with regard to our Father's 'kingdom.' We relegate both to the future, and therefore we fail to recognise our own immediate personal interest in both. We confuse together two things which are perfectly distinct, we confuse together the *existence* of God's kingdom, and the *universal acknowledgment* of that kingdom; and then because we cannot yet see the latter, we overlook the existence of the former. And yet, in doing this, we are acting just as foolishly and as ignorantly as a man would do who should walk through a field covered with the tender wheat-blades of early spring, and should say, 'I see no crop here,' because he chooses to define a 'crop' as consisting only of ripened ears gathered into the garner. Let us remember that the young blade contains within itself the future ear; that the golden harvest involves the necessity of a preceding crop of little pale-green shoots; and even so does the heaven of the unseen life involve the necessity of a preceding heaven of the seen life; not altogether like itself, it may well be, but still containing, within the present, the germ of the hereafter. And even so does God's kingdom of the hereafter also involve the necessity of the preceding existence of His kingdom in the new.

Take another illustration. Imagine a widespread and deeply rooted rebellion against our own beloved

Queen. For a time her armies are paralysed, and shut up within a few strong positions. A town or city here and there—isolated families up and down the land—remain loyal; but the mass of the country is in revolt. After a time the heart of the nation slowly changes; one stronghold of rebellion after another is taken; the rightful sovereign is again recognised. Can anything alter the simple fact that our Queen was really and truly the Queen of the country even when her power was least recognised, and her rights most strenuously denied? Would it not be the Queen's law that existed everywhere, even when its action was temporarily suspended? Would not even the rebel armies consist of those who could not help being the Queen's subjects, even while they were bearing arms against her? And would not her faithful subjects, even when they were in the smallest minority, be fully justified in saying, 'Ours *is* the Queen's kingdom, and no one else's. God grant us so to show ourselves loyal, that the day may come when all once more shall recognise, as we do, that she has been our Queen all along!' Even so is it the case with 'Our Father's kingdom' here on earth. Even such is the prayer that we breathe when we pray these words, 'Thy kingdom come.'

Now when we carefully examine and analyse the various passages in the Bible in which the 'kingdom of God,' the 'kingdom of heaven,' the 'kingdom of Christ,' &c., are referred to, we shall find that they all speak of a present fact which is to develop into a future

fact; a present order of things which is designed slowly but surely to bring about a future order of things. We may arrange the whole of these expressions under one or other of four divisions; or, as I should prefer to word it, we find one thought of God being our present King set forth in four distinct stages, each necessarily developing into the one that follows it. Very briefly must I indicate these four separate stages on the present occasion.

I. There is, first, St. Paul's definition of what the 'kingdom of God' really means (Rom. xiv. 17). It means something personal. It means something individual. It does not consist in the performance of external acts of religious ceremonial. It consists in something which is, so to speak, the personal property of the individual heart. It is 'righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.' That is to say; to live the life of God's child, to know that peace which the recognised presence of a Father alone can give, to feel that joy of loving and being loved which our Father's Spirit breathes into our souls—*this* is the setting up of our 'Father's kingdom' within the heart of a man.

II. That this is intended by Christ to be recognised as a present and not a future state is abundantly shown by His own words (Luke xvii. 21), in which He plainly intimates that the 'kingdom of God' was not the name of an event to be hereafter manifested with great demonstration of power and glory, but that it was the name of that state of men's hearts, already preached and

set up among them, in which the one Father of Love is recognised as a personal king. And the various parables of Matthew xiii.—all illustrating the nature, the growth, the future destiny, of the kingdom—show us that the phrase is of more than individual application. The whole world is only made up of individuals, even as a vast mountain is composed of grains of sand. As is the character of the atoms, such is the character of the mass. As is the heart of individuals, such will be the great world-heart. The kingdom of God signifies a state of heart and mind in individuals. As those individuals multiply, so will the same term describe a state of heart and mind which characterises a certain community in the world, which has partly learned, and is trying yet more and more to learn, how to love and honour a personal Father as its only King. That community we call the 'Church'; a name not confined to any sect or nation, but embracing all those, wherever or whoever they may be, who, in their innermost hearts, are desirous of loving 'One God and Father of all,' and who recognise the laws of that Father's appointing as being laws of righteousness, peace, and joy.

III. So far the state of heart and mind of which we have spoken, whether in units or in the aggregate, describes a present state of things only. But that present state of things is spoken of as growing, increasing, developing, into a future state, even during the existence of the present age of world-life. And here we may notice that, speaking with strict accuracy

this growth and development of the world's history is spoken of in the Bible as being the 'kingdom of *heaven*,' and the 'kingdom of *Christ*,' to distinguish it from that still further hereafter of which we also hear. It is our blessed Lord who, through all these ages, is reigning over all, presiding over the world-education, leading hearts to His and our Father. Over this state of things shall He continue to preside, as St. Paul tells us (1 Cor. xv. 25), so long as any enemy of His Father shall exist. How long this order shall endure, we cannot tell. God counts time by thoughts, not by years. It may be the result of slow accumulation of loving hearts for centuries—ay, ages—yet to come. It may be the result of an instantaneous magnetic thrill of thought, simultaneous throughout the world; even as the thunder cloud lours darker and darker, yet still silent, until the electric tension has reached a certain point, and then, with no visible alteration of state, the pent-up forces are released, and the overwhelming shower descends. Be this as it may, Christ shall continue to reign over the hearts of men, ever more and more widely known, ever more and more dearly loved, until the last enemy shall be subdued, until the last heart of living man shall be brought by Him to see the Father; and then shall the fulfilment of 'God's' kingdom on earth be fully accomplished, and the knowledge of the Lord shall cover the earth even as (oh, marvellous and mysterious similitude!) the waters fill and cover the bed of the mighty ocean.

IV. And then, and not till then, shall the kingdom of Christ, the kingdom of Heaven, the kingdom of God on earth (all different names for the same thing) come to an end. Then (1 Cor. xv. 24; Rev. xxi. 3) shall Christ 'deliver up the kingdom to God, even the Father;' and God, Father and King for evermore, shall dwell among His children, here on a purified and glorified earth, His own self the final 'all in all.'

Now, all these thoughts, which I have tried to sketch out to you in such bare and meagre outline, are contained within those words, 'Our Father's kingdom.' For each and all of the things whereof I have spoken, and for a thousand other things of which I cannot speak, but which each heart must think out for its own self, do we pray, when we say, 'Thy kingdom come.'

Let us try to realise this. The crowd of thoughts is overwhelming at first; but still let us quietly endeavour to get some notion of what they really are.

1. First, we must try to realise that this is a prayer for our own spiritual lives. We pray that we may be enabled ever to recognise Christ as our King. We pray that we may ever be truly loyal to Him. We pray that every rebel thought may be subdued to Him. We pray that all our powers of heart and mind may be enlisted as faithful soldiers in His service. We pray that we may serve no power but Him, may know no laws but His. We pray that our lives may be simply lives of righteousness; in order that out of righteousness we may

find peace and joy. And, as it is the Father's kingdom for which we pray, we also ask that, through this recognition of Christ our King, we may be further led on to the fuller realisation of our Father-King. Here comes in once more the old key-note. Woe to the heart which fancies it can rest content with the mere knowledge of Christ. If the Christ-King does not reveal the Father-King; if the Brother does not lead us through Himself to the Father—we shall never get our prayer fully answered; we shall confound 'king' with 'despot;' we shall dread and shrink from God, although seeming to cling to Jesus, we shall remain cowardly and timorous slaves, instead of entering into the glorious liberty of true children of a father, true subjects of a king.

2. Secondly, we must again learn not to stop short at self. It is *our* Father's kingdom for which we pray. It is His recognition by and in the world for which we entreat. And, to do this, we must rise to the faith that He is, even now, the present King of the earth. I know this is hard to see; I know there are many who treat God as an absentee from this earth of His. I know how there are thousands who say that the world is all evil; nay who even declare that it is growing worse and worse. I don't believe it. I reject all such timid, half-hearted vapourings as a libel against our Father-King. I grant all the sin, all the shame, all the darkness, all the disorder. So was it in the primeval chaos; but for all that God was King of the chaos, and His Spirit was

brooding over the seething masses of the depths of the unknown forms of matter out of which His orderly laws were evolving the material of this fair earth. Shall His power and His love fail to accomplish in the heart of humanity that which it did for the insensate masses of mere brute matter? Not so. Out of all this evil He is slowly working good, shaping, as He sees best, that moral material which He knew to be the best to work upon. *Why* He chooses for ever to produce good out of evil, joy out of sorrow, victory out of struggle, we cannot do more than guess. But the fact is there. Evil, pain, conflict *are* the materials out of which our Father is building up nobler, fairer, higher, sweeter, lovelier possibilities in the hereafter, than could have been accorded to children who had learned without an effort, or conquered without any real warfare. And through it all, God's law is sovereign. No lie thrives. Right, beaten down for a time, reasserts itself in the end—

> Thro' the ages one increasing purpose runs,
> And the thoughts of men are widen'd with the process of the suns.

Look at the world's history as a whole in time, and a whole in extent. Take, not one nation here and there, but the whole of God's earth. Take, not the vices or shortcomings of a class, but the general character of a nation. Take not even the character of individual nations, but a fair survey of the thousand million denizens of the earth. Has there not been a gradual, steady, unchecked average progress of the knowledge of

God's laws, and of the obedience thereto? There is a science-gospel, as well as a soul-gospel. Has there not been ever more and more an unchecked discovery of the laws of Nature? Has there not been, for example, a steady advance in God's kingdom of the knowledge of the laws of cleanliness and of health, as well as in the knowledge of the name of Christ? Go back in the world's history; strike a fair balance, at the end of each century, of the aggregate amount of light and happiness in the world, and the total number of people among whom that light and happiness are diffused, and then say if there has not indeed been one steady purpose running throughout the whole; then say if, indeed, a Father of Love has not been gradually revealed to man as the King whose Kingdom of Law ruleth over all! And then, clinging to this faith, hear how wonderfully grand and deep roll forth the words, 'O Father! Thy kingdom come. Let my poor, weak, loving, childlike heart have its little place in helping on Thy work!'

3. And so, as we look on from God's work now, to the possibilities of His work after we are gone to our rest, does the vista of the future open out before us more grand and more glorious still. We pray for the extension, the growth, the development of those eternal and unalterable laws of order which we believe that we even now are living under. Are we not warranted in looking forward to a future accomplishment of this prayer? Oh yes! Say not that it is the dream of an imaginative enthusiast. Some day—I know not

how long first—but some day *shall* there come a time when the cravings of every childlike heart of every age shall be fulfilled. Through the darkness God's world is winning to the light. Through the pain it is being made able to see the joy. Through the jangling discords of political and religious warfare it is being slowly purified of the elements of discord. And, some day, all shall know the Father-King, from the least unto the greatest; and universal obedience to His laws shall be the final answer to the present cry of the myriad weary human hearts, which, however differently different souls may word it, are breathing everywhere the same worldwide longing, 'Thy kingdom come.'

4. Therefore also, as the final outcome of all, do we also pray, in these words, for that hour in some far-off future, when, Christ's kingdom here below having reached its full completion, God's throne shall be set upon earth, and His servants shall worship Him, and they shall see His face, and the dear Father's Name that they have learned to hallow shall be set as an Eternal Seal of perfected Fatherhood and Sonship, in their foreheads. For the coming of that time does all creation groan and travail. Towards the hastening of that time does every earnest prayer, every unselfish action, every pure thought, every honestly spoken truth, every loving look, every childlike recognition of our Father, lend its force to aid. The greatest forces are the result of the slow accumulation of small—nay, of individually imperceptible—moments. Let it be yours and mine

not only to pray with our lips, but from our hearts, and not only to pray from our hearts, but to live out in our lives, the child's earnest cry to the Father whose true name it has learned to hallow:—'Our Father! Thy kingdom come.'

VIII.

OUR FATHER'S WILL.

'Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven.'—MATT. vi. 10.

THERE is a story which tells us that, long long ago, a very wise philosopher was commanded by a certain great Eastern King to explain to him clearly what he considered God to be. The wise man asked for a couple of days in which to consider his answer. At the end of that time, he asked for four days more. At the end of these four days he again asked for eight days more. At the end of this period, he begged for a still further extension of time. Being asked why he thus kept on ever pleading for longer and longer time to be given him, he replied that the more earnestly he endeavoured to realise what God was, the more unable did he feel to express the solemn depth of his convictions.

Very similar to the feelings of this ancient sage must, I think, be the feelings of everyone who honestly tries to face and to think out the grand, the overwhelming thoughts which are contained in those few words, so familiar yet so little understood, which come before us to-day:—'Thy will be done.'

In these words we are distinctly brought face to face with the great and mysterious world-problem of pain. According to the solution which our hearts are capable of recognising for that problem, depends entirely the question whether we, as sorrowing and suffering children of earth, can lovingly cling to an infinite trust in an infinite Personal Love; or whether we must abandon ourselves to a gloomy submission to a grinding fate. I humbly acknowledge that I feel most sorely my own unfitness to set forth to you what scanty glimpses I seem to have gained as to the possible true solution of this problem. And yet, believing as I have been led to do on the subject, I dare not keep silence; still less do I dare to ignore, or evade, either the terrible realities of the question brought before us, or the infinitely glorious realities of the answer which I believe may be honestly given to that question.

Let me once more remind you of the intensely personal bearing of these opening petitions of the Lord's Prayer. First we are taught to pray that we may learn to know, to love, and to reverence God, by His name of 'Abba'—'Father.' Next, we are led to think of this Father as being the King of all space and time, who has devised certain laws of government for His Kingdom; laws, in the learning, submitting to, and executing of which, we can help on the complete recognition and universal acceptance of that Kingdom. In the third place, we have to learn that 'Our Father's will' is, the ultimate happiness of His children, in their

attainment to the highest form of life possible to each of them; and that all the laws of His kingdom have been so devised as to bring about this result for each; quickly, if the child be willing and obedient; more slowly and more painfully, if the child be ignorant or stubborn.

Now, if I were asked to explain or define, in the shortest and most practical phrase possible, what I conceive to be God's 'will' with regard to every one of His human children, I should reply: 'Our Father's will' is, that we should, each and all, learn to do and to bear hard things.

Does this seem a strange reply? I daresay it does. There are those to whom it will seem inconsistent, paradoxical, nay, even dishonest, for a clergyman to talk one moment about God being a Father of absolute Love, and the next moment to acknowledge that He has devised laws which are calculated to produce an inconceivable amount of suffering upon those who either do not know them, or who disobey them. And yet, in the full conviction, begotten of long years of earnest, often agonized, study of this petition, I can honestly speak as I now do. I fully realise (few men more so) the existence of the awful mystery of pain, and of evil. I acknowledge the awful and incalculable amount of suffering that the heart of man has had to struggle through, and still will have to struggle through. I fully acknowledge that God might have dispensed with all this, had He seen fit. I fully acknowledge that

God might have prevented the entrance of evil and pain into the world, had He chosen to do so. Nay, more. I claim that God is bound by His own eternal laws of right and wrong. One of those laws is, that no intelligent creature is justified in the infliction of pain upon another intelligent creature, unless he is fully persuaded that such infliction of pain is the only possible means of producing some great good, in the end, for the sufferer. And so I seem to catch a glimpse of Light penetrating the great world-darkness. God *could* have kept man painless, had He so pleased. But then man could never have attained to the highest possibilities of his nature. His goodness would have been negative, not positive. Higher, nobler, grander, purer, sweeter, holier far, is the ultimate life of that being who out of pain has won to a joy infinitely surpassing the calm and undisturbed serenity which marks the unruffled life of another being who has never fought, never struggled, never suffered, never done and borne hard things.

Is there not a divine instinct implanted within our bosoms, which compels us to realise the truth of this principle, in the ordinary events of every-day life? Whence comes that intuitive honour which every heart ungrudingly pays to the hero, whether of public or of private life, who has suffered much and patiently? Whence comes the stoicism which makes the Indian savage, captured by his enemies, endure with a smile of calm contempt the most horrible tortures that human

ingenuity can invent? Is it not the consciousness that he, as a brave sufferer, is more truly manly than any one of his executioners? Is it not the consciousness that even they, while they are torturing him (even as he would torture them if he could), are nevertheless honouring him in their hearts, it may be actually envying him the privilege of dying so noble a death? Or turn from such an illustration as this, and mark the quiet sufferer, spending a quarter of a century, or even more, upon the couch of helplessness, possibly never once free from pain the whole of that time. Do we not, again instinctively, realise the nobleness of such a life, borne, as it often is, without one murmur, without one peevish expression for years together? Can we not feel, as we look on such a life, that the calm endurance of hard things has exalted that life to a level far above our own? And, if so, is not the pain well worth having, at the price? Or, again, to take the active side of this great law of elevation through suffering, is it not the brave and gallant soldier whom we admire and respect, and to whom we accord a pedestal of fame far higher than that attainable by the quiet peaceful stay-at-home civilian, good and true man though he may be, in his own sphere? Is it not again the man, be he professional soldier or not, who has proved his true manhood by some act of noble gallantry or self-devotion, whom we honour and reverence; and, even if he have lost his life in the effort to help others, do not we feel that such a loss is indeed a patent of

true nobility, and that it has exalted him to a position in our esteem and love to which nothing else could have entitled him? Oh, yes; in every conceivable case we cannot help recognising that hard things nobly done and nobly borne do ennoble the workers or the sufferers, and make them far higher and better beings than they could ever have been, had there been no hard things allotted them to do or to bear.

Once more, to take a somewhat lower, and a very practical, view of the subject. Who is it that really succeeds in this life? Is it the man who is surrounded by every comfort, and needs no more? Is it the man who sits down contented with the discomforts and squalor of his domestic surroundings, or the disadvantages of his social position? Is it the man 'who takes things easy'? Is it the man who simply aims at his own personal comfort, and cares for little else, so long as that is secured? We know it is not so. We know, as a simple matter of fact, that the doing and bearing hard things is an absolute condition of succeeding in any profession, or trade, or any walk of life. The man who is content with lazy mediocrity *cannot* get on. The man who, of his own free will, voluntarily denies himself, gives up his own little pleasures or luxuries for the sake of his family, or even for the sake of an ultimate hope of success, years and years distant—he is certain in the end to attain to some measure of that success which, unless he had undertaken to do and to

bear hard things, would have been for ever unattainable by him.

Can we not see, then, how the experience of every-day life teaches us this clear lesson, that the doing and bearing of hard things necessarily raises us to a higher platform than can ever be reached by those who have only done and borne easy things?

Remembering this, then, let us next remember that lesson which we have been trying to learn from every sentence of this prayer. God calls mankind His *children*. It is the privilege of children that they can inherit the image of their father; that they tend to reproduce the resemblance of all his powers of mind, and of heart, as well as his features. Even so is it with us. As God's children, we are capable of developing a likeness to our Father. As God's children, our hearts, thoughts, wills—all our spiritual faculties—may be like His; less, it is true, in degree (for a child could never overtake the wisdom of a father who never grew old!) but absolutely the same in kind. Now, this is a destiny far above and beyond that which is the lot of the angels. Even in his fallen and sinful state, David tells us that man was made but 'a little lower than the angels.' And he adds that hereafter it was God's purpose to 'crown him with glory and honour,' by raising him to a position far higher and nobler than theirs. The angels, who were created sinless, and have remained so, are not raised to the dignity of God's children. They are 'ministering spirits;' the *servants* of the Home to

come; but as the son in his father's house is above the servants of the house, so shall even the smallest and the feeblest of God's redeemed children hereafter, be far higher, far nearer, far dearer to Him, than the highest archangel, who has obeyed 'the office of His word' from all eternity. This is a thought not sufficiently realised. We do not believe, as we ought to do, in the inconceivably glorious possibilities of the human spirit. We don't sufficiently recognise the marvellous dignity of the hereafter to a soul which has entered into the 'liberty of the sons of God,' and, having overcome, has sat down with Christ, in equal glory and liberty, upon His throne, even as He Himself, having similarly overcome, sat down upon His Father's throne.

And why is this? *Why* is the future destiny of sinful but saved mankind to be so much higher, nobler, sweeter, than the future destiny of holy spirits who have never known one thought of disobedience?

Simply because man has got the possibility of struggling upwards through pain and through darkness, and thereby of attaining to a joy and a light to which none can be admitted who have never gone through such a struggle, who have never 'come out of the great tribulation.'

This, then, is why 'Our Father's will' seems to involve so much pain and suffering everywhere. He knows that out of that pain and that suffering the child may rise to the full possibilities of sonship; whereas,

without it, it could never have risen higher than the position of a servant. Surely, surely, when we can once believe this, our Father's law of education through pain becomes no longer an inscrutable mystery, but can be accepted by us as the highest outcome of His perfect love and perfect wisdom—a love which will not shrink from the infliction of a passing pain, because it longs, with a fervent craving, deeper and stronger than we can ever guess at, to raise the suffering child out of sorrow into true and permanent happiness, and bring it safely to its Father's house ;—a wisdom which knows that the victory which follows conflict, even after repeated failures and defeats, is inconceivably more noble and more glorious than the calm and uniform complacency of a life that has known no cross, and, therefore, is incapable of winning any crown.

I think that I have said enough to render it unnecessary for me to dwell upon the minuter details of our lives to which this prayer applies. If what I have tried to say has been understood, each heart will be able to recognise its application to its own case. If I have failed to make myself comprehended, it will be of little use to enlarge further on the subject. Suffice it to say that, as I read this petition, it means much the same as though we were to say: 'O Loving Father! do Thou carry on my education, and the education of all Thy children, by just such lessons as will raise us all as near as possible to Thine own self. If joy will teach us to know Thee best, send us joy. If sorrow and pain are

needed, to teach us lessons which joy is unable to teach, we pray Thee not to spare the pain and the sorrow. Only help us to learn; and never mind how hard the lessons are. Thy will is our salvation. Thy will is that our hearts and minds shall be made as healthy as is possible for them to become. O Father! let that loving will of Thine be evermore done in us, by us, through us.'

Such, as I take it, is the true prayer of the true child-heart: the prayer, the honest pouring forth of which will be made to help in working out its own fulfilment, in blending and fusing our wills into our Father's will.

In this spirit do we pray that we may be enabled to *do* God's will. Naturally we most desire to do that which is easiest and pleasantest at the moment to ourselves. In this petition we ask that we may be led ever to try and do simply that which is right. Right is Right simply because it is that which will bring about the most and the truest happiness, *in the long run.* We pray that we may be enabled to understand this, and may learn never to shrink from facing and choosing that which is painful and hard at first, so long as it is possible for us thereby to help in bringing about happiness to others. This is God's will;—this is our Father's will;—that for His sake, and for the sake of His other children, we should willingly and lovingly set ourselves to *do* hard things.

We pray, also, that we may be enabled to *bear* God's will. Too often this is the *only* meaning attached to this petition; and, therefore, it is very important that

we should remember that it has an active side as well as a passive one. But when the pain comes to us, not merely as a consequence of trying to do the right; when separation, and loss, those two necessary elements of this life-history, enter into our hearts; when weariness, and weakness, and the sense of failure and defeat in all our best endeavours, seem to chill the very core of our souls, and to crush all the life, all the manhood, all the power of *doing* out of us;—then still let us look upward and onward:—onward to the end which we know cannot, at farthest, be very far distant:—upward, to the smile of tender Fatherly love which beams down upon us ever the kindliest when our hearts are the sorest and the most discouraged. And then, if we can do no better, let our feeble lips still faintly stammer forth such words as these: 'Oh Love, of whom, through whom, and to whom are all things; "Thy will be done!" Our elder Brother was made perfect through sufferings. His younger brethren can only learn in the same school as He did. Therefore welcome the suffering, welcome the pain, welcome the loss, if only we may thereby be made more like unto Him; if only we may thereby be raised one step nearer unto Thee.'

And so shall this prayer, like all true prayers, work out its own answer. So, gradually, perhaps slowly, but still surely, shall the child attain a firmer and fuller persuasion of the Father's love. So shall the child's will, again gradually and perhaps slowly, cease to struggle and rebel against, and even question the lovingness and

the fairness of the Father's will. So shall the words, 'not my will, but Thine, be done,' become a *reality* to our hearts, instead of a mere expression of compulsory resignation. So shall we cease to have any will whatever of our own, but shall be utterly content to leave everything belonging to us or affecting us absolutely in the hands of an Infinite Love and an Infinite Wisdom. And so, at last, when our will and our Father's will are absolutely one, shall we find that that will was all along, even when it seemed the hardest to us, and when we were the least able to understand it, only fulfilling the promise of Him whose education was carried out in exactly the same way, and to the same end, as ours must be:—'What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter.'

IX.

GOD THE GIVER.

'Give us this day our daily Bread.'—MATT. vi. 11.

THUS far we have seen how all the various petitions in the Lord's Prayer are, directly and primarily, requests for the supply of our own spiritual needs. In those clauses which follow the one that comes before us for our consideration to-day, we shall notice the same general character. Thus the three first and the three last of the seven petitions have their meaning centred upon the wants of our lives as spiritual beings. But the middle one of these petitions, while its words fairly include the wants of the spiritual part of our lives, directly and primarily refers to the wants of our bodily frame; of that house of flesh and blood inside of which the true man, the real 'I' and 'Me,' is made to tabernacle for the few short years which form a petty atom in the entire existence of the man.

Now it seems to me well worth our while to notice the position which our Lord assigns to this petition; for in proportion as a heart looks upon the wants of this

life as of first-rate importance,—in proportion as we are absorbed in the 'struggle for existence' and the earnest effort to do our work in the world,—just in the same proportion shall we be disposed to give the precedence to our bodily needs, and to pray for health of body, and success upon our honest efforts; and such persons would have felt inclined to pray 'Give us our daily bread,' at an earlier period of the prayer. But there is another school of thought, which professes to neglect, or ignore, what some are pleased to call this 'vile body.' There are some who think that what they term our 'religious' needs are of far more importance than any bodily needs at all. There are those, for example, who would imagine it to be our duty to cry for pardon, long before we gave a thought to the petty necessities of earth. Now to both these schools of thought it seems to me that our Lord administers a practical rebuke, when He thus deliberately elects to place the necessary wants of our bodies just in the very middle of that prayer after the pattern of which He wills us to pray; thus teaching us, as it seems to me, neither unduly to exalt, nor unduly to depreciate, the health and soundness of that body which is capable, according as it is healthy or sickly, of exercising so much influence upon our spiritual growth.

For I cannot doubt that our Lord intended this petition to bear the full meaning which is given to it in our Catechism. I cannot doubt that He designed its words to include 'all things which be necessary both

for our bodies and our souls.' And hence, once more, we note how suitable is the position assigned to this petition. Standing midway in the prayer, it summarises and includes all that goes before and all that follows. And thus it breaks the prayer, so to speak, into three portions. The first prays,—'Make Thy children like Thyself.' The second asks that these bodies of ours may be so far kept strong and healthy, that they may not impede this growing likeness to our Father. The third portion chiefly glances at the difficulties and temptations which clog us and hinder us in our efforts to grow like our Father, and prays that we may be preserved safe from sin, in the midst of this strife.

As, then, this petition occupies so peculiar and so important a position with reference to the rest of the prayer, I feel that I cannot attempt to analyse the whole of the leading thoughts which it suggests to us, in a single sermon. I shall, therefore, confine myself today to the consideration of its first word, and ask you, in connection therewith, to think of God as the GIVER.

And, believe me, the thoughts which this word brings before us are of immense,—of surpassing,—importance. I do not hesitate to say that upon our right understanding of this word depends the question whether or no our hearts are capable of rising to the true heights of Christianity, or whether they are still grovelling in the depths of heathen tradition. God

help us! Much of our so-called Christianity is clogged and defiled and made unworthy of the name by the clinging relics of a long out-worn, but still strangely hereditary, heathenism. Christ teaches us to look to a Father who gives. Heathenism teaches us to look to a master who bargains. There is one of the eternal points of difference between the two systems, in a single sentence.

For it is the very essence of Fatherhood that it gives. A father gives, and gives freely, all that he can. He drives no bargain with his children. He does not stipulate for so much service, and so much equivalent food and clothing. The very notion is destructive of all family ties; of the very notion of fatherhood itself. Our Father in Heaven, therefore, must be, emphatically, THE GIVER. He gives to all alike. When Jesus tells us to aim at perfection, even as our Father which is in Heaven is perfect, He distinctly defines wherein God's perfection consists; telling us that we shall show ourselves true children of that Father if we copy Him 'Who maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust!'

Thus, then, it is emphatically the duty of an earthly father not to allow himself to favour one child above another; nor to make necessary food and necessary education dependent upon the conduct of the child. If a father starves or cruelly treats a refractory child, we call him a bad father; we say that he does not know

how to educate his child. So with 'our Father.' Whatever is really necessary for us, to give us our fair chance of growing up in our spiritual life, He will *give* us; give it freely, even to the refractory and disobedient.

There are some who seem to think that God keeps a sort of ledger account of our lives, marking down so much sin and so much punishment; so much obedience, and so much reward. Can we not see that this notion at once deposes God from His true position as a Father, and degrades Him to the level of a mere taskmaster? There are some again who fancy that what is called a 'religious' life is only a cunningly devised scheme for trying to secure for our own selfish selves some superior reward in a hereafter state. Nay, it is not so. It cannot be so. Those who think, who talk, who teach, in this spirit, do but misunderstand and slander the Father of Lights, who giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not. He is the giver, because He is the Father. A father makes no bargain with his child, saying, 'If you will love me, I will love you.' The true father says, 'My child, I love you. I can't help loving you. I shall love you always. Won't you try and love me back again, in recognition of all this love which I so freely give to you?' That is the tacit argument of a true earthly father:—nor is it in the least degree different with our Father in Heaven. His one word to us is for ever and evermore the same as the 'burden of the Lord' which Malachi was constrained to deliver:—'I have

loved you, saith the Lord.' Clear, deep, grand, unmistakable, rings on that voice through the echoing aisles of three-and-twenty centuries:—'I have loved you, saith the Lord.' Oh, when will the heart of Christendom pulsate with answering throb, and shaking off for ever the last chill remnants of lingering heathenism, reply, 'O Father of Love! Give us the true child-heart of responsive love, that we may know the things which are freely given to us of God!'

And now I must further beg of you to try and realise that when we speak of God as a Giver we must take care not to connect with this thought any notions of *arbitrary* giving, or of capricious interference with the natural order of events. God is emphatically the God of law. He deliberately impressed certain thoughts of His as laws upon all physical and spiritual nature from the very first. He deliberately selected these laws out of His absolute wisdom and absolute Love. He selected these laws simply and only because they were laws of right. And, in God's judgment, that is right which in the end produces the greatest happiness to those who will conform to it. Now, as God chose these absolutely wise and absolutely loving laws, it stands to reason that He cannot change them, supersede them, or modify them. I want you to be clear about this, because some people talk about God's 'sovereignty,' as though He could and did set aside any law of His, at any moment, if He so wished it. I cannot believe this. I cannot believe that God can do anything except by law. If He ever broke

or set aside a single law, for a single moment, by His own mere autocratic will, it would follow that either the motive for the original law, or else the motive for its breaking, were not equally based upon Love and wisdom. Both could not be equally wise and equally loving. But if God could be conceived of as anything short of absolute wisdom and absolute Love, He would cease to be God at all. No. Men may change, and waver, and fluctuate; but God 'changes not.' God is a God of law, God the Giver is a giver by and through the laws which He has made. And, therefore, the cry of 'Give us,' is not a mere lazy petition that blessings may be bestowed upon us without any action at all on our part, but it really means, 'Give us such childlike love to our Father, that we may ever submit ourselves to His loving will; and, by obedience to His laws, may obtain the blessings which those laws were in the first place designed to work out in and for all those who will learn them and obey them.'

And this thought brings us fairly face to face with one of the great difficulties of the day. As God is a Giver by law, He is also a Giver in answer to prayer. I know full well the difficulty of this problem to many. There are those,—and not merely frivolous and ignorant objectors either,—but earnest, learned, deepthinking men and women, to whom it seems that prayer is unreasonable, because we are supposed therein to ask God to interfere with His own laws for our own personal benefit. But this is *not* the Christian theory of prayer.

It is the *heathen* theory of prayer; and as such, I utterly reject it, although I may find it existing in the mind, (it is not in the *heart*,) of many an earnest-meaning Christian. I believe that the theory of answer to prayer rests upon a sound and solid scientific basis. I believe that answers to prayer are brought about by the action and reaction of certain fixed laws of nature, which God designed in the first place for that very purpose. What those laws are, this is not the time or place for me fully to explain. Suffice it to say that I am fully convinced of their existence; and that physical science is even now trembling on the very verge of their formal discovery; and it may well be that, before another generation has passed, our best and foremost scientists shall thankfully acknowledge that the human mind is endowed with powers of reacting upon other minds, which make an earnest and concentrated effort of will, such as a prayer, capable of setting in motion reactions which shall bring about its own answer, in proportion to the earnest conviction of the petitioner. And I believe, too, that this will one day be acknowledged to be the permissible commentary of modern science upon our Master's words, spoken so long ago:—'Whatsoever ye ask in prayer, *believing*, ye shall receive;' and we shall learn to look upon these words as no mere arbitrary promise, or visionary's dream, but as the simplest scientific formulation of a law of God's universe.

But, if this be true, as I solemnly believe it is, it leads us to a deeper and a holier thought still. The

earnest effort of prayer brings our heart, our thoughts, our minds, so to speak, into contact with the heart, the mind, the thoughts, of another. Then it follows that the longing expression of a childlike desire for love instantly places us in communion with the love that is unbounded. The honest cry for light places us in connection with the Source of all light. The prayer for wisdom brings our spiritual system into union with a wisdom above and beyond our own. I press this thought upon you, as affording the true theory of prayer, and its answer, in regard to spiritual matters. Cry to the Giver, and that soul-yearning works out its own response. The recognition of the Father makes the child more childlike. Cry feebly or coldly; and the response, the reaction, can be only feeble and cold. Cry earnestly, warmly, and the response and reaction will be correspondingly warm and earnest. Science tells us that if we ascend a mountain, and thereby approach nearer to the sun, even a single man, in proportion to his weight, actually draws the sun proportionably nearer to himself. So the Bible tells us to 'draw nigh to God, and He will draw nigh to us,' not as an arbitrary act on His part, but as the necessary result of our own approach to Him. And this is really what we want. We want to get nearer to our Father that we may be able to feel more and more of that Love which He so freely and ungrudgingly 'gives' us. Therefore let us cast away, once and for all, the last remnants and tatters of what I have called the heathen notion

that it is possible to persuade or cajole God into doing things, or giving us things, for our own personal interest. Let us cast away all heathen notions about God 'giving good things,' whether on earth or not, as a return for, or recognition of, any services rendered, or piety shown, by us. Let us hold fast by our one keynote of 'Our Father.' Let us cling to the one thought that Our Father has given us His Love; that Our Father's Love has provided laws which will give us all good things, if we obey them; which will give us pain so long as we break them, in order to make us feel that we are breaking them. And, strong in this faith, let us unceasingly cry to Him that He will continue to 'give' us all things that are needful for us; certainly assured that by that very cry we are placing our hearts in such a relation to His heart that a portion of His wisdom can be transfused into us, enabling us to see the right, and to do it; and, in seeing and doing the right, to give ever more and more of our heart's love to that dear Father of all whose message echoes from of old into our ears;—'I have loved you, saith the Lord.'

X.

OUR FATHER'S GIFT OF 'BREAD.'

'Give us this day our daily Bread.'—MATT. vi. 11.

WHEN I last spoke to you on this text, I tried to bring before you the one leading idea of God as the Giver. And, in doing this, I endeavoured to illustrate three principal thoughts, namely:—

1. That God, as the Father of all, gives to all; unconditionally, and quite irrespective of any return that we may, or may not, make to Him.

2. That our Father thus 'gives' to His children, not by arbitrary acts of personal interference, but by the orderly action of unchangeable laws, specially devised for this purpose.

3. That the more earnestly we seek to realise communion with this Father of all (as in the act of prayer), the more do our habits of thought become identified with His; the more, *therefore*, are we able to perceive and submit to His laws; and (again *therefore*), the more certainly do we receive an answer to our prayers by no isolated acts of interposition on His part, but as the logical consequence of certain laws of spiritual

Reaction, which have been set in motion by the action on our part.

I. We now go on to ask, *what* is it which our Lord thus teaches us to ask our Father and His to 'give' us.

We note, in the first place, that our Lord teaches us to ask for nothing but 'Bread'—*Bread*, the 'Staff of Life'—denoting, in accordance with the familiar definition, 'all things that be needful,' both for our bodily and our spiritual lives. 'All things that be *needful.*' We are not told, we are not permitted to ask, for anything more than is actually necessary. Nor are we permitted to choose or define for ourselves what is necessary and what is not. We simply ask our Father to give us exactly that food which is needful for us, under our existing circumstances; and we leave it to His Love and His Wisdom to decide as to what that needful supply shall consist of.

We ask Him to give us the bread needful for our bodies. As I have already remarked, we must clearly understand that these bodies of ours are not beneath God's notice. We are distinctly commanded to 'glorify God in our bodies, which are God's.' How can we do this? There is but one answer—by studying and trying to obey our Father's laws of bodily health; so that in keeping our bodies as strong and well and healthy as we possibly can, we may make them instruments of His glory, by being able to do the greatest possible amount of work in this world of His that our several constitutions and organisations are capable of doing.

Everyone's body is a machine capable of performing a certain amount of work—of labour for God, and in God's service. If we do anything to impair the action of this machine, and thereby lessen the total amount of work it was intended to get through, we are actually defrauding God of some portion of that service which He expects of us. Therefore, when we pray for our daily '*bread*,' we pray, in the first place, for such a measure of health and strength, and such a measure of wise understanding of, and compliance with, the laws of health, as will enable these bodies of ours to do as much as possible of that amount of work which our Father knows them, in each individual case, to be capable of doing. We pray, therefore, that we may be kept temperate, chaste, and pure. We pray that we may have wisdom to avoid the ascertained sources of disease, in ill-drained, ill-ventilated, ill-cleaned dwellings. We pray that the clear knowledge of God's laws of Bodily Health may grow and spread, so that our bodies may not suffer by diseases arising out of the intemperance, unchastity, or uncleanliness of others. We pray, in a word, that nothing may hinder us from glorifying God in our bodies, even as Jesus did; but that our whole lives, like His, may be given up to conscious labour for our Father, our chief desire being to 'finish His work.'

For, in order to glorify God in our bodies, we must not only keep them physically healthy, but we must also keep them at work—at labour. High or low,

peer or pauper, professional man or day labourer—we must *work*, if our bodies are to remain healthy. Our work will be of very different kinds. Some must work with their hands, and some with their brains: some with the spade or the machine, some with the pen or the tongue. But *some* work we must do, or our bodies will at once begin to deteriorate. The careless idler, who only lives for one amusement or distraction after another is deliberately disobeying God's universal law of work, and will pay the penalty, in weakened muscle, impaired digestion, enfeebled brain; all of which will disqualify him or her from glorifying God in their bodies; and, when what we call 'this life' comes to an end, their tale of work will be found incomplete, and the place assigned to them in the hereafter *must* be correspondingly lower than it might otherwise have been! Oh, believe me, God's perfect wisdom and perfect love is set forth in none of His laws more strongly than it is in that old commandment, so often forgotten, so often set aside:—'Six days shalt thou labour.' By keeping that commandment shall we act out the spirit of our prayer: 'Help us to keep strong and well, in order that we may labour for Thee.' By neglecting that commandment shall we daily give the lie to our own daily petition for our daily 'bread.'

But while I believe that the primary teaching of this petition leads us thus to believe in the nobleness and dignity of these bodies of ours, and the nobleness and dignity of the effort to keep them in as perfect

health as possible, not for our own gratification, but simply in order that they may be able to do the greatest possible amount of work for God, we must not forget that there is a further, and a very helpful and comforting lesson, in connection with this same part of our subject. It seems to me to speak to us of a Father who loves to have His children telling Him about *all* their bodily wants and necessities. Here again I am sure that Christian people often deprive themselves of much help and consolation, by not clinging close enough to the intense persuasion of God's Fatherhood. The idea is widely spread that while we may claim God's attention to our spiritual pains and wants, our little every-day bodily pains or pleasures are beneath His notice. Those who imagine this only do so because they lose sight of 'Our Father.' A true earthly parent never thinks the childish prattle, the childish pains, the childish joys, of his little ones beneath his notice. They run, and climb upon his knees, and babble to him of all their little childish thoughts, not merely unrebuked, but lovingly listened to and sympathised with. Shall an earthly father do this, and yet cast no corresponding shadow of the eternal verity of the Heavenly Fatherhood? Nay, it cannot be so. If God be, in any true sense, 'our Father,' He can feel nothing but pure delight when any child runs to Him, to consult Him on matters which are important to its own little childish self. A father's sympathy recognises his child's pains and his child's pleasures, childish and petty as

they may be in themselves, as being great, relatively to the child; and so in the oneness of his heart with the child's heart, they become great to him for the moment, and he can smile or weep with the little one's smiles or tears. So is it—so must it be—with our Father in heaven. We must not fancy that *anything* is beneath His notice. Let us take to Him all our bodily needs, pains, losses, longings, pleasures; even the very little ones! Let us tell Him freely, openly, unreservedly of them all; well assured that He is never better pleased than when the loving child prattles to Him lovingly of every little thing in which it fancies that it needs some 'daily bread' for its body: well assured that He will respond to that childish confidence by reacting upon us with ever more and more full and bountiful supplies of all things which His wisdom (seeing farther and deeper than our unwisdom), knows to be really *needful* for us.

I have dwelt at some length upon this portion of our subject, because I cannot help feeling that it brings before us some thoughts which are not often enough, or deeply enough, considered by Christian people. I pass on now to ask, What is it that we mean by '*bread*,' when we pray our Father that He will give us all things 'needful for our souls'?

And here let me remark, at the outset, on the wonderful parallelism which appears to exist between the laws and phenomena of bodily life, and the laws and phenomena of spiritual life. Perhaps some day we may

find that this connection is something deeper and more intimate than a mere parallelism; but, at any rate, we may consider it as such for the present. And I think I shall not misstate the case, when I say that every known fact of our bodily lives has an exact counterpart in some fact of our spiritual lives, so that we may argue with perfect certainty from the one to the other, and thus, by studying the details of the seen may learn how to detect the corresponding details of the unseen.

Now, our bodily life is one of incessant growth. Hour by hour our bodies wear out. Day by day considerable portions of our frame perish, and are carried away. Day by day, and hour by hour, fresh material is formed in the healthy body, and exactly replaces the day's wear and tear. So long as health and vitality continue, so long does this incessant decay and repair continue also. And the means whereby this replacement and repair is kept up is, the assimilation of wholesome food, taken into our system in proper quantity, and at regular and not infrequent intervals. Protracted abstinence from food impairs health and lessens work-power. Large meals at long intervals have a distinctly unhealthy effect. Diminution of the supply of food below a certain standard, deprivation of certain special kinds of food, infallibly result in producing enfeebled vitality, and loss of the full power of repair. In a word, for our bodily life to be kept up to the standard of health, it must have a sufficiency of food, of a given character, and at regular intervals. If

the supply be insufficient, irregular, unwholesome, or lacking in certain chemical constituents, it may be enough just to keep life going, but the body will pine and dwindle, the strength decay, and the work-power fall far short of what it ought to be.

I ask you to believe that every word of the preceding paragraph is strictly and literally true concerning the life of our souls. Day by day and hour by hour the wear and tear of life and its daily frictions impair our spiritual systems. This can only be replaced by food. That food is what we ask for when we cry to our Father for our 'daily Bread.'—And, if you want to know what that Bread is, let us hear the answer which Jesus Himself gives us (John vi. 48) :—

'I AM THAT BREAD OF LIFE.'

Let us clearly understand whither this chain of argument is leading us. To '*feed*' in a bodily sense, signifies to receive into the bodily organs that which is subsequently carried throughout the whole bodily frame. To '*feed*' in a spiritual sense, therefore, signifies to receive into our spiritual organisation something which is subsequently caused to circulate throughout that entire spiritual organisation. Let us clearly understand, once more, that the language employed describes just as much of a reality in the one case as in the other. It is not fact with regard to bodily life, and metaphor with regard to the spiritual life. There is a spiritual reality, which answers, word for word, detail for detail, with the bodily reality. When our

Lord Jesus spoke of Himself as being the 'Bread of Life,' He meant us to understand that just as material bread, taken into the body, becomes metamorphosed into bone and muscle, and keeps the bodily machine in motion, even so He Himself can be received into our spiritual organisation, that is into our hearts and minds, and (oh grand and marvellous mystery!) can become part and parcel of our very selves; so that it is no mere metaphor, but a literal fact, when the Apostle speaks of 'Christ in you,' or when the Lord Himself said, 'Whoso receiveth one such little child in my name receiveth ME,' or declared, 'Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to ME.'

I hold, then, that real, actual, and personal receiving of Jesus into our hearts and minds is not only possible, but is *the* thing which we pray for, when we ask for the 'daily bread' of our souls. Other kinds of spiritual food, other modes of spiritual feeding, there may be; but this is the only one which Our Father has ordained, and which our Lord has designated for us under the name of 'Bread.'

I do pray you not to imagine that we can dare to play fast and loose with these words which we are thus compelled to use. Do not dare to take them one moment in a literal and real, and the next in a metaphorical and unreal, sense. That which is spiritual is just as *real* to the spiritual side of our being, as that which is material is *real* to our bodily senses. And, I repeat it,—it is not the 'knowledge of' Christ, or the

'love of' Christ, or the 'faith in' Christ, which is said to be the food of our souls; but it is Christ Himself; the personal Jesus personally recognised, and personally present to our spirits; just as real, just as spiritually realisable, as He was real and materially realisable when He walked this earth veiled in a tabernacle of human flesh.

I hold, too, that this feeding upon the Bread of Life is a thing which can be done by every loving action of our spiritual lives. Every prayer; every longing wish; every upward look; every tear; every sigh; every half-hearted trustful thought; every act of love done, every word of kindness spoken, for Christ's sake; —all these are acts of spiritual feeding; all are means whereby the essence of Christ is (so to speak), incorporated with our own spiritual essence. And *this* is what we pray for, every time that we repeat the words, 'Give us our daily bread.'

Oh, if we could only live in *this* faith,—in the faith of this possibility,—what a different aspect life would wear to many of us!

But while we most gratefully and thankfully recognise that it is possible for us thus to feed upon Christ in our hearts, and thus to find Him to be our 'daily Bread,' assimilated by our spirits, and carried throughout the whole system of our spiritual being, in the countless little unseen acts of mental prayer and trust, and in the countless little, barely recognised, loving acts of our every-day lives,—still we must not forget how He Himself, in immediate connection with the words in which

He declares Himself to be the food of our souls, in no doubtful phrase sets before us one special way in which it is possible for the weak and hungry soul to feed upon the Bread prepared for its sustenance. In this connection our Lord deliberately chooses to use expressions so closely identical with those which He employed when He instituted the Lord's Supper, that I think no candid mind can deny that He intended them to foreshadow the symbolism of that Rite; that He intended us to understand that the Lord's Supper is no mere isolated act on our part, but a joint act; not merely an act of giving, but an act of receiving; not merely a bare memorial offering of our loving remembrance, but a communion of our spirits with His Spirit, and, thereby, a means whereby His Spritual life becomes transfused into our spiritual life, taken up into our spiritual system, circulated throughout our spiritual being.

Now, if this be so, how great must be the loss of every Christian who tries to lead a Christian's life and do a Christian's work, without having recourse to this means of obtaining 'daily Bread'! Remember how I urged on you the exact parallel of bodily and spiritual life. If we take our principal meals irregularly or seldom; if we neglect one principal meal in the day altogether; if we confine ourselves to food that is wanting in some one necessary ingredient; in any of these cases life may be still preserved, but we shall pine, and dwindle, and be unable to do half our appointed work. I cannot, I dare not, set aside the analogy here. If any

persons come irregularly or seldom to the Lord's Table: —if any persons fancy that they can lead a truly Christian life without coming at all;—then I say, not that such persons' spiritual life will be destroyed, or rendered utterly useless; but I do say that such persons' Christian life will pine and dwindle; I do say that their love and trust will infallibly be weaker,—I do say that their power of doing God's work will be immensely less,—than they might have been, had they only availed themselves of the way which Jesus specially points out for receiving the largest, fullest, best, most necessary portion of our appointed 'daily bread.' Oh, believe me, I pray you, when I tell you that just as every neglected meal starves the body, so every neglected Communion starves the spirit. Believe me, when I warn you that every Christian who neglects Holy Communion, and yet uses the Lord's Prayer, does virtually give the lie to his or her own words each time that they pray for their 'daily Bread.' Believe me, once more, when I tell you that every time we come to the Lord's Table, lovingly and humbly asking that there we may obtain 'daily Bread,'—then, of a surety (whether we feel it or no), an act of *real* taking of the Lord Jesus into our hearts and souls is effected; a real amount of fresh health and vigour (appreciable to God's eyes, though often inappreciable either to ourselves or to others) is imparted to our souls; and we are thereby enabled to think a greater number of true and loving thoughts, and to do a greater number of kind and loving actions than

we ever could or should have done, had we insisted on taking our soul-food in our own self-chosen ways and at our own self-chosen times, instead of just simply taking our Father at His word, and seeking at what the old edition of our Prayer-Book so beautifully called '*Godde's Boarde*,' the 'daily bread' which He there offers us as the fullest, truest, sweetest, holiest answer to our cry for 'all things needful' for our spiritual health and strength.

XI.

OUR DAILY BREAD.

'Give us this day our daily Bread.'—MATT. vi. 11.

DEEPLY impressed as I am with the vast area of thought, so to speak, which is covered by this, the central, petition of the Lord's Prayer, I have felt it right, at the risk of appearing tedious, to devote a considerable amount of our time to its illustration. I have tried to show you how Our Father is the Giver of all that is really good for us, by means of His wise and loving law that, in proportion as we place our spirits in communion with His Spirit, so do we learn to think as He thinks, and to see as He sees; and thus are enabled to choose and do the really good, and to avoid and reject the really evil. I have also tried to show you how that which is really good, and really needful, for us, as described by the word 'Bread,' may be summed up in one other word, namely, '*Health*.' Health of our bodies, to do Our Father's work; and because their ill-health is certain to produce or exaggerate the faults and weaknesses of our spirits. Health of our spirits, because health,

holiness, salvation,—(all these words coming from one and the same old Saxon root, and meaning substantially the same thing,)—signify that state of heart and mind in which we recognise our relationship to God as His children, and seek to love Him and trust Him, as a little child loves and trusts a wise and tender parent.

This is the state of body and of spirit which we ask for under the name of 'Bread.' And so we see how this petition, like those which have preceded it, is a prayer for our own growth in personal holiness, or child-likeness. And now I want you to notice how this petition is, so to speak, deliberately limited by a twofold qualification.

I. First, we do not ask simply for bread, but for 'daily' bread. The original word which is translated 'daily,' will scarcely bear that interpretation; which seems to have been partly rather forced into it from the equally mistranslated expression in Luke xi. 3:—'day by day.' The latter words are more accurately rendered in the marginal reading, 'for the day;'—and the qualifying adjective 'daily' seems to signify, 'sufficient for maintenance.' 'Give us this day sufficient bread,' is the more accurate rendering of our text. 'Give us for each day as it comes sufficient bread' is perhaps, a true equivalent for the words recorded by St. Luke.

1. It seems to me that in these words we find, first, a lesson of trust in Our Father, that He will always give us sufficient bread for each day, as it comes. We are only taught to ask for to-day. We are not permitted to

look forward till to-morrow. We are not encouraged to cast a single thought into futurity. Do to-day's work to-day. Use to-day's strength to-day. Feed on to-day's 'bread' to-day. Do this, and a power and a love above your own will provide for to-morrow, as soon as 'to-morrow' has become 'to-day;'—but not before. He who teaches us this lesson taught us also that other lesson:—'Sufficient for the day is the evil thereof.' In these words He fully recognises that each day, as it comes, brings with it its own allotted share of weariness, loss, grief, temptation. But along with that allotted share of 'evil' comes also the allotted share of 'bread.' 'As is thy day, so shall thy strength be.' Is the day full of hard things? Then all the fuller is it of the power to do and to bear the hard things of that day. But, if we go anticipating the possible evils of to-morrow, or raking up and dragging into to-day, and fretting over, the past evils of yesterday, then we shall find that to-day's burden *is* heavier than to-day's strength is able to bear. No. Our lesson, our prayer, is, Give us this day the food needful for this day. No less. But not one morsel more. The child that loves and trusts *can* pray thus. But the soul that shrinks from praying thus has not yet attained to the stature of true childhood.

2. Once more:—As these words teach us to trust our Father for the quantity of each day's bread, as each day comes, so do they also teach us to trust Him for its quality.

Sometimes we hear or read the wish, 'May your life be all sunshine.' Oh me, what a bitter, blasting curse that wish would prove, could it ever be fulfilled. A life all sunshine! No blessed cloud to screen the ground from being hopelessly scorched up. No blessed rain to water the parched clods of a heart sterile through drought. No needful, though rude, blast, to compel the weakly shoots to absorb nourishment more rapidly, and so strengthen their too slowly-forming fibres! If all were sunshine, our lives would become like the bright face of the moon, a howling wilderness of torrid annihilation! Oh no. The cloud, and the rain, and the storm are needful ingredients of our lives, necessary portions of our daily bread. Let us clearly understand this. Let us pray this prayer with our eyes open. Let us distinctly remember that, when we cry for 'daily bread,' it may be that we are actually asking God, not for things which we call pleasant, but which He sees to be needful. If sorrow, loss, pain, sickness, be needful for us at that particular time, we are actually asking Him to send them to us. Our cry is this: 'O Father, make us more childlike! Bring us nearer to Thee! Nearer to Thee, at any price! If pain brings us nearer to Thee than joy can do, then send the pain and withhold the joy! If suffering will make us more childlike than comfort, take away the comfort and let suffering be our lot! Never mind whether our daily bread be sweet or bitter! Thou knowest best, and we don't. Give us the right thing, and help us to trust

Thee that it *is* the right thing. Only make us more childlike, and do Thou choose the way how best to do it!'

Can we honestly pray thus? With no mental reservation? With no silent wish that our Father's way may, after all, be a pleasant one?

God help us! How our poor hearts stand silent before this question! yet, believe me, it is a needful standard to test ourselves by. It is the standard which the true child-heart conforms to. It is the standard which in so far as we shrink and hold back from, just so far short do we come of the true child-heart.

I feel very deeply the import of these words as I speak them. No better New Year's Day subject, no truer New Year's Day lesson, could I have selected. Let me link on to it one thought of last New Year's Day: 'How old art thou, my child?' This is again the Father's message of to-day! 'Still fretting, still fuming, in the nursery; crying for vague, unattainable brightnesses? Still grumbling over hard lessons, in a corner of the schoolroom, and thinking how unkind the teacher is, to set you a task that you cannot master? Or, clear-eyed and trustful, conscious of ignorance and failure, weary of labour, but still workful, growing more and more of thy Father's child, hast thou grown a year older in love and trust? a year stronger to do and bear My will? a year more willing to leave the choosing of thy daily bread in the hands of One that doeth all things well?'

3. If our hearts have been able to follow what has gone before, we shall also remember that our text contains the idea of continuous supply. While we discard the use of the adjective 'daily,' yet the mention of 'this day,' and 'for the day,' clearly recognises the probability of a continuous succession of 'to-days,' and, while we only ask for one day's supply at once, we are not forbidden, but distinctly encouraged, to remember that there may well be many more such 'to-days' in store for us. And so, I think, we are once more forcibly reminded of the thought which I have before dwelt upon at length; namely, that a continuous succession of fresh need must be met by a continuous succession of fresh strength, supplied by a continuous succession of fresh food. Such is the story of our bodily lives. Such also must be the story of our Christian, or spiritual lives. Life is growth. Let us never forget that. Ay, and in our bodily lives, so long as health and vitality assert themselves to the full, the worn-out tissues of each day are replaced by tissues capable of becoming harder, tougher, more enduring, than those which have been removed. So also must it be with our spirits. It is no uncommon thing, too, in daily life, to see a man or woman, as they grow older and stronger, also developing new resemblances, in gesture or feature, to some parent or other ancestor. So with us here. The older we grow in our spiritual lives, the stronger to suffer and to work must we also grow; and (oh, thank God for *that*) the more may we, each

year, develop a likeness to our own Father: more like Him in work; more like Him in patience; more like Him in love! So may we, receiving from Him 'our daily bread,' be also daily filled with His own loving spirit, '*more and more*' in ever-increasing progression, each year of our lives, until at last we enter into His unseen and spiritual kingdom.

II. But I must pass on, now, to the second qualification under which we ask God to give us our 'daily bread.' In the first case we sin against the spirit of this prayer, as we have seen, if we ask anything for to-morrow, or if we do not leave the question of happiness or sorrow entirely in our Father's hands. In the second place, as I have already remarked on former occasions, we also sin against the spirit of this prayer, if we ask for the needful things, either for ourselves alone, or for ourselves one bit more than for others. For one and all alike, not more for us than for others, not less for others than for ourselves, do we pray, 'Give *us*.' The moment that the cry 'Give *me*;' me first, or me only, becomes the true expression of our hearts, that moment do we shut ourselves out from that full communion with God's Spirit which alone can bring about the true fulfilment of our prayer.

Here then, in one word, is the difference between the gospel of Jesus Christ, and the so-called 'religion' of the world.

Christ teaches us, 'When ye pray, say, Our Father, give *us*.'

Modern 'Religion' tells us, 'When ye pray, say, O God, give *me*.'

The 'Gospel of Union!' The 'Religion of isolation!'

Oh, my dear friends, do we not need to learn this lesson? Do we not need, indeed, to learn the lesson of unselfishness and mutual interdependence? I speak not now of the merely selfish struggle after personal comfort and luxury. I speak not of the commercial sins of our day. I speak not of the political rule of the personally and momentarily expedient. I speak not of the war between labour and capital, the impending development of which we have yet to see. I speak not of any struggle after personal aggrandisation at the expense of others. All these things are laid at once under the ban of the Lord and of His Christianity by the one word, 'Give *us*.' I cannot stay to dwell at length upon the myriad developments of the self-principle in the midst of a nation professing righteousness, and calling itself Christian, while it practically defines Christianity to be, doing just exactly what Christ would not have done, had He found Himself placed exactly under our circumstances. Rather I want you to see and understand the *meaning* of this word in the Lord's Prayer. I want you to see that it was eternal wisdom and love that placed it there. I want you to remember that the constitution of Society is such that it is like a machine, in which the different wheels represent different classes, or professions, each having an allotted

work to do. As long as all the wheels work in mutual interaction the appointed work of the machine is performed. But if one wheel, or one cog, be 'out of gear,' it becomes more or less isolated, and the performance of the machine is rendered uncertain or otherwise impaired. So is it with Society. So is it with those societies of the great world which we call Nations. If one unit isolates itself, or tries unduly to aggrandise itself, the performance of the whole machine is injured; all the wheels suffer with the isolated wheel, and, lastly, it suffers itself by the others failing to co-operate with it. What is one man's gain is another's loss; perhaps the loss of hundreds. And though it may seem to go smoothly with the one gainer, for a time, still, sooner or later, the loss of the others comes round and reacts upon him, and he suffers far more than he gained at first. The reaction may be slow, but it is sure; for

Tho' the mills of God grind slowly, yet they grind exceeding small.

Greatly, indeed, then do we need to ponder over, and live out, the lesson of these words, Give '*us*' '*our*' daily bread. Leave us not alone to sink into an isolated struggle. Help us, as members of a society, more and more to work together. Give me no more than my fair share. Bless all honest labour of others, as well as mine. Bless their work through mine, and mine through theirs. Help each to help the other; looking, each man, not on his own things, but each man also on the things of others; that so the spirit of our Lord's

life and our Lord's words may be fulfilled in us, and that the true likeness of children to their Father may come out more and more clearly in our words and deeds, in our hearts and lives.

And, yet once more, I think that we learn in these words a lesson of almsgiving. We know that God works by means. Therefore, when we pray, 'Give *us*,' and know that there are some that have need, is it acting out the spirit of our prayer to say that we must leave it to others who can 'afford' it, to relieve their necessities? Not so. That would be praying, 'Give *them*,' not 'Give *us*.' If we pray this prayer, and yet fail to give alms liberally, according to our power, I have no hesitation in declaring that our petition is but a mockery and a sham. And the power of almsgiving is much larger than really Christian people too often imagine. The mischief is, that preachers do not preach, and Christians do not realise, the truth that almsgiving is just as much a duty of Christian life as private prayer, or united worship. And the almsgiving, too, must be a solid and appreciable portion of our income; and not merely the conventional threepenny or sixpenny piece, which men possessing hundreds a year rather congratulate themselves upon placing in an offertory-bag, week after week! Hard as times may be, many as the calls upon us may be, God's call is the loudest; and harder will it be for us, some future day, if it cannot be said, 'Thine *alms*,' as well as 'Thy prayers,' have come up for a memorial before God. We have

too much looked upon almsgiving as a spasmodic emotion, instead of a systematic duty. Our duty is, not to spend that we have, first, and then give away what we can 'afford,' but to determine, each New Year's Day, to set apart during the coming year a certain appreciable portion of our income, be it great or small, for helping on God's work in the world. He that lives by this rule, be he peer or peasant, can honestly pray, 'Give *us*' our daily bread. He that tries to make excuses for giving nothing, or practically nothing, is in danger (would God that he would only believe it!) of some day finding out that he has, without knowing it, brought himself under the operation of the unchangeable law, 'He that soweth little SHALL reap little:' of finding that he has, year by year, grown less and less like unto the true character of his heavenly Father; less and less able, therefore, to love that Father; less and less capable, either now or hereafter, of recognising His Presence.

And so, once more, we must end as we began. The study of this petition has led us through an entire circle of Christian faith and Christian practice. And yet we have but barely glanced at a few of the leading thoughts, and scarce any of the details, into which it may well lead us! But, I think, we have seen enough to help us to feel, more than ever, that the one thought of God's Fatherhood is the one key-note of all Christian life—that Christianity is not the profession of a creed,

but a personal growth in Christ-likeness; because the more like we can be to Christ, thinking the same sort of thoughts, saying the same kind of words, doing the same sort of deeds, as He would have thought, spoken, or done, had He been in our place, the more like must we also grow to Him who is His Father and our Father.

And this ever-growing likeness to our one common Father is the sum and substance of what we ask for, when we pray, 'Give us this day our daily Bread.'

XII.

FORGIVENESS.

'Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.'—MATT. vi. 11.

IN asking you, as I have done throughout the whole of these sermons, to take the Lord's Prayer as a model, or pattern, in accordance with which we should try to frame our own private prayers, I have more than once called your attention to the importance of noticing the order in which the petitions follow each other. Naturally we tend to ask first for that which we need the most, and afterwards for that which is less urgently required. And we may feel sure that our dear Lord, as a man, tempted in all points like as we are, in like measure has taught us, out of the fulness of His own struggling and sorrowing heart, to cry first for that which ought to be put first; and next for that which, though perhaps not of less importance, is, at all events, second in its rightful and appointed order.

So far we have seen that every petition is a prayer for our own personal holiness, and for growth therein. Every petition is an earnest longing, breathed from a child to a Father, that the child may grow more childlike.

And since the wants, and pains, and fretfulnesses of our bodies often make us less childlike than our spirits fain would be, therefore we are, finally, taught to ask that we may be helped to keep ourselves in such health and workful vigour, that the frailties of our bodies may not unduly impede us in our growing childlikeness.

For all these things are we taught to pray, *before* we are bidden to ask for forgiveness. And now, in its proper logical order, comes that which too often claims the first, almost the exclusive, place, in some of our prayers; namely that thought of the need for *forgiveness*. I say, in its logical and proper order; because the sequence of thought is this. As frailty and disease impede our bodily health and work, and drive us to certain remedies, in order to get rid of them; so will frailty and weakness interfere with our spiritual health (or 'Salvation'); and, unless we can get rid of these, our life and workfulness will be hindered. The sick man may have good food, but he either turns from it, or, if he eats it, it may do him no good. So with us. We may still get our spiritual food; but, if our spirits are unhealthy, the food will either not nourish us, or we shall turn from it with aversion. Unless the diseases of our soul be '*forgiven*,' our food will benefit us little, our strength must fail, our very life be endangered. And, therefore, this is the proper place in which to ask for 'forgiveness.'

Now, why is it that good people, praying people, so often fail to see this aright? Why is it that whole bodies of religious people put forgiveness first, and holiness in a

secondary position? Why is it that you so often hear the expression that some person who is supposed to be 'converted,' has 'found forgiveness'? Is not all this rather reversing the order of spiritual need, as set forth in the Lord's Prayer? Is it not exalting into the first place what Jesus puts in a much later place? I think it is. And I think there are two principal reasons why it has come to be so with us.

The first reason why we reverse Christ's order of spiritual life, and ask for forgiveness before we ask for holiness, is, because we have such a strong natural tendency to look at *consequences* instead of *causes*.

When a child has done something naughty, and is detected, he at once cries, 'Forgive me.' What does he mean by this? Nothing more than 'Spare me the punishment I have incurred. Don't whip me. Pray let me off, this once!' It is only the punishment that he dreads. If you let him off, he will do the same thing again the next minute, if he thinks he can escape detection. He does not hate the wrong thing. He does not wish to drop the evil habit. His only desire is to be able to do it again and again; and to be free of its consequences. Now, have not grown-up Christians practically got to believe in a very similar doctrine? Have we not mixed up together sin and the consequences of sin? Don't we want to keep the sin, while we dread its consequences? When we cry, 'Forgive!' do we mean more than 'Save us from pain! Spare us from hell! Don't punish severely!'

God help us! Is it not so? We don't hate sin because it is hateful in itself, but only because we think it may hurt us some future day. And so, also, we have invented doctrines which teach us that a man may be 'forgiven' once and for all, and then go on sinning, and it will make no difference to him. Nay, we even hear the doctrine taught that a man may go on sinning all his life, and then, at the end, stammer out a few words of professed repentance, and so be 'forgiven;' and then, when he dies, God will be just as pleased with that man as with another who has been trying to hate sin and love God for fifty years past! And all these false, hateful, health-destroying doctrines have sprung up among us, because lazy, selfish teachers teach, and lazy, selfish congregations believe, that all we have got to do is to 'get forgiven,' and then we shall be sure to 'go to heaven.'

God help us, once more! When will preachers preach, and people learn, that holiness *is* heaven; and that sin *is* hell:—that holiness is to be sought all our lives through, because it is supremely lovable:—that sin is to be fled from, not once for all, but all our lives through, not because of its possible consequences, but because it is, in itself, supremely ugly and unlovable?

The second reason why we put forgiveness in too prominent a place is, because we don't understand what the word itself means.

All English words beginning with *for*, are made up of the preposition *from*. To *for*bid is to *bid* a person

from us. To *for*get is to *get* a thing put away from our mind; and so on. Therefore to *for*give must mean to *give*, or allow, something to be put away *from* us.

What, then, is it, with respect to which Jesus bids us 'ask and it shall be *given*,' to be put away *from* us?

Not hell. Not pain. Not punishment. Not the consequences of our sins. Oh, no! Something far better than that. He teaches us to pray that it may be *given* us to be set free from our SINS themselves. And oh! what a difference, wide as the east is from the west, is there between the thought that was in the mind of Jesus, and the thought that is in the minds of those who take the popular view of *forgiveness!* God help us all to see, and to live out, that difference!

And does not the very name of JESUS bear out the same thought? He was called because He should save (or make healthy) 'His people from their sins.' 'From their sins,' you see. Not from the pain or sorrow, either here or anywhere else, that a sin, once sinned, *must* bring after it. Jesus does not offer to take away one jot or one tittle of that. Nay He *cannot* do it. Sin indulged in will leave, perhaps for everlasting, a scar or a weakness in the very essence of the spirit. What Jesus does is to say, 'Love Me, and that love will make you loving and lovable; and so shall it be *given* you gradually to get set free *from* one sin after another; gradually to grow more and more like Me, your Brother; gradually to live more and more as the true child of our common Father!'

Once more, let me repeat it, the only 'forgiveness' worth having, the only 'forgiveness' which Jesus teaches us to long for, is something more than mere acquittal; something more than the mere blotting out of the remembrance of past sin, or even the setting us free from the consequences of those sins; but it is the enabling us to hate, to flee from, and finally to get free from, the sinful habits themselves.

But I must pass on from the consideration of this word 'forgive,' to the thoughts which cluster round that other word 'debts.' And I think it no light misfortune that, in the most popular version of our prayer, the word 'trespass' has been introduced, which has no counterpart whatever in the original. In the formula of Luke xi. the repeated occurrence of the idea of indebtedness inclines me to believe that in both cases our Lord employed a Hebrew word meaning 'debt,' as the equivalent of 'sin.' At any rate, the Greek word in St. Luke has no connection with the word 'trespass.' It signifies a failure to hit a mark; or a shortcoming; both of which ideas nearly correspond with 'debt.' But to 'trespass' signifies to step across an appointed line, or boundary; which conveys a very different notion indeed; for it implies the notion of doing something that is plainly and actively wrong; whereas our Lord thought it more important that we should begin at the beginning, and pray to be set free from those little failures to pay our spiritual debts, which when accumulated, will end in driving us to actual and open trespass, or transgression.

Now, what is the exact meaning of the word 'debt,' or 'failure to pay,' in this prayer?

Too often have people been led aside by the temptation to work out a sort of commercial symbolism in explaining this petition. Too often are we taught to think of God as keeping a sort of running account with us; putting down so much sin on the one side, and so much pain and punishment (as worldly people imagine), or so much repentance and forgiveness (as many religious people fancy), on the other side of the account. I don't believe that this idea will help us at all, but will rather hinder us, by representing God in a character that is not His. Then again, some have tried to improve on this commercial view of the matter, by referring to the parable of the talents, and representing us as having all received, so to speak, a certain amount of spiritual capital from God, on which we have to pay interest, in the shape of a religious, or moral, life. But I must set aside this explanation also, as tending, not less than the other, utterly to subvert the notion of our true relationship with God.

Our common phraseology will help us to see what the true meaning is. We talk of owing, or paying, a *debt* of gratitude. The good old English word '*duty*' means neither more nor less than *debt*. That other simple but grand old word 'ought' carries along with it a similar meaning. And St. Paul tells us what that meaning is, when he says, '*Owe* no man anything, but to love one another.' There it is; our 'debt' is Love.

When we pray, 'Forgive us our debts,' we mean '*Give* us to get free *from* our lovelessness.'

Now see how our master key unlocks this difficulty also. Every child *ought* to love its father—*owes* a *debt* of love to its parents. So every wrong thing that we think or do or say pains our heavenly Father, and is a failure, or a coming short, in paying the Love which is His honest due, and nothing more.

Is it not so? We have prayed, I doubt not. We have striven, I doubt not. But, for all that, have we not come short, do we not daily and hourly come short, of loving our Father even as much as we wish to do, and how much more of what we ought to do? Therefore let us seek more and more to pray this petition from this, the child's point of view: meaning, 'Father, *give* us to be free *from* these shortcomings! Take away from us our unlovingness, that we may love Thee, and our brothers, better. Take away our unloveableness, that our brothers and sisters may be able to love us better, and that we may cease to pain Thee so much and so often. Forgive us our debts.'

Now what a different aspect does sin assume, from this point of view! And how does *pardon* sink into mere insignificance, when placed side by side with *forgiveness*! We want love. To be left unloved, out in the cold, out in the dark,—this is the one evil thing to be dreaded. To love: to be loved: and to be conscious of this mutual love; this is worth living for; for this

and this alone, is heaven. Of what use would it be to us to have the guilt of our past sin looked over or remitted, while the sin itself, like a poisoned dart, was left to rankle in our spirits, as loveless as ever, running up fresh debts of unloveableness every moment?—Oh, no! 'Forgive us our debts' means 'Help us to put away our habits of indifference or unkindness to Thee, and to others. So shall we grow more and more out of our unchildlikeness, into the true liberty of God's own dear children; year by year, however slowly, developing more and more of likeness to our Father.'

And now that we understand what to be 'forgiven our debts' really means, we can also understand why we ask for this boon under a certain condition. By this condition we deliberately recognise God's unalterable law of Love. To be forgiven our debts means that we are to grow more loving. In proportion as we fail to love, in exactly the same proportion, not *shall we hereafter be*, but *are we*, *even here and now*, unforgiven. That is God's fixed law. He Himself cannot change it. A loving soul *is* a forgiven soul. A loveless soul *is* an unforgiven soul. And, therefore, knowing this law, knowing that God *cannot* set it aside, we deliberately put ourselves under it. 'Forgive us,' we cry, 'AS we forgive others.' In the same way as—to the same degree as—we forgive, so be it forgiven us. If we forgive little, slowly, coldly, grudgingly, so must we ourselves be forgiven, and we ask no other! Did you

ever realise what an *awful* petition this is for a harsh-judging, cynical, spiteful, unneighbourly, unlovely and unlovable soul to utter? I pray you, think of it thus. In our daily lives it must be that offences will come. It must be that others will be unkind to us, or we shall fancy that they are so. It must be that others will, rightly or wrongly, feel that we are unkind to them. It must be that we shall run up debts of unlovingness to them, and that they will run up debts of unlovingness to us. Can we, do we, dare we, honestly pray this prayer in the face of all this? If we hesitate to make the first advance towards reconciliation, then we actually pray God to hesitate in sending whispers of love into our hearts. If we say, 'We forgive, but cannot forget,' just so do we pray God to deal with us! God help us once more! How often do we limit and circumscribe the unbounded lovingness of our Father to us, by making it impossible for His lovingness to break down our lovelessness, for months, and years, it may be for a whole lifetime. How many of our bitter complainings that God is hard upon us are only too true; simply because we have tied and bound in iron fetters of our own coldness and unlovingness that Love of His which He is all the time longing for us to let Him manifest to us. But He *cannot* force us, for the simple reason that forced affection is not Love at all. Love is an instinct. Love is Love simply because it is Love and produces Love. The outward profession of affection, with the hope of

thereby obtaining any supposed reward, either here or hereafter, has no connection with Love whatever, and must not for a moment be mistaken for it. Thus, then, once more are we compelled to conclude with a reference to our ever-recurring keynote—'Our Father.'

Our Father is pure perfect Love. A child loves its father, not because the father gives it nice things, but out of simple instinct, just because he is its father. Any failure to render this instinctive love, or to love its father as it *ought*, is a *debt*. What we call '*sin*' is a failure to love our Father; a failure to pay our debt of pure unselfish affection to Him; and a profession of selfish love, only because we think we shall gain heaven thereby, is as much a sin as any other proportionate failure to render pure simple instinctive child-love. In proportion as we render this, in like proportion does our power of loving Him, and others, expand; and in like proportion do we grow more and more able to pay our debts of love to all. Again, in proportion as we fail to see the love of God, or of others, and as we nourish thoughts of dislike to them, or of belief in their unkindness to us,—exactly in the same proportion are we loveless and unlovable, our 'debts' of love accumulate, and we are unforgiven.

God grant us, each and all, some day to hear words something like those spoken to the woman of old:—'Seest thou how she loves? That love proves that her sins have been already forgiven her; for had not her

bitter rebellion been put away out of her heart, she could not have loved.'

God grant us, again, each and all, every day of our lives to test our own soul-growth by that inexorable law:—'To whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little.'

XIII.

OUR FATHER-EDUCATOR.

'And lead us not into temptation.'—MATT. vi. 12.

I THINK that this petition is the most likely to be misunderstood, and the most difficult either to comprehend for oneself, or to explain to others, in the whole of the Lord's Prayer. As a rule, I fear that people are satisfied with very vague and even self-contradictory notions as to what Christ meant when He taught us to think that it really is part of Our Father's duty to us to 'lead us into temptation.'

That last sentence may seem a strange one. But I mean every word of it. And I believe that it supplies us with the key to the true comprehension of this petition, as well as to the fuller understanding of one very important aspect of God's relationship to us.

Let me refer you back to an expression which I made use of in a former sermon. I said, then, 'every father has certain *duties* towards his children—duties which if he neglects, he thereby falls short of the true idea of fatherhood, and forfeits his claims to be spoken of as a true father. In accordance with our principle,

. . . we are bound to apply this same idea to God's relationship with us.'

We must then fairly face the grand and solemn truth that God has certain duties to His children; and that, if He failed to discharge those duties to the full He would neither be Our Father, nor Our God, at all.

One of a father's duties is, to supply his children with suitable food. We have already seen how Our Father in Heaven does this for us.

A second duty is, to supply his children with suitable education. An earthly father who fails to do this, however kind he may be in other respects, is a bad father. Therefore we may be sure that Our Father cares for the education of His children at least as much as He does for their food-supply. We have already caught a glimpse of this truth when we considered the meaning of 'Thy will be done.' In the present petition we shall catch a yet further glimpse of Our Father's education-plan; and shall be led yet better and more fully to see Him as the great universal Educator.

Let me first explain to you exactly what the word *education* means. It does not mean learning lessons. *That* is instruction. That forms part of our 'daily bread.' The knowledge, the information, the learning, which we put into a child; which (as the word *instruct* originally meant) we lay in due order in, or upon, the child's intelligence, form necessary preliminaries to its true education; but that is all. To *educate* means, not to put something into a person's mind, but to draw

something out of a person's mind. You put the instruction in, in order that you may afterwards be able to *educe*, or draw forth, the very same knowledge as applied to life and practice.

A wise teacher combines these two processes in constant succession. First he teaches the child how to do a rule in arithmetic (we will say). Then he gives the child sums to work, which will draw out the knowledge he has been putting into the child's mind. These sums at first are easy; then harder; and, sometimes, all of a sudden, he will give the child a strange and very hard problem to work, to see, as we say, 'if he has got it in him'; that is to say, to see if the child has fully digested the *instruction* received, so as to be capable of drawing it forth, and applying it practically, and so to find out for itself ways and means of working sums, the exact method of doing which it has never been shown. This is testing the child's knowledge. This is subjecting the child to a hard trial. This, to use the language of our text, is 'leading' the child 'into temptation.' And this, neither more nor less, is what our dear, loving Father is daily doing with you and me, when, in the following up of His allwise scheme of education, He daily 'leads us into temptation.'

It is absolutely necessary to our true understanding of God's character that we should learn to acknowledge this fact. Let us look it straight in the face. Let us not try to soften or explain away one word. Let us

honestly confess that 'temptation' means not only the sorrows, perplexities, and trials of this life, but that it also distinctly includes temptations to sin. Let us clearly comprehend that God, after He has shown us the difference between right and wrong, does, by His providence, deliberately bring us, at times. face to face with the wrong, does deliberately 'lead us into temptation,' in order to help us to turn our theoretical knowledge into practical use.

Does this seem a strange, an over-bold, assertion?

Nay; but I have full and abundant Scripture warrant for it, otherwise I never had dared to make it. Are we not told that our Lord was tempted '*in all points*' like as we are? (Oh, cling to that '*in all points*' as the most precious truth in the Bible!) And, again, are we not clearly told, in St. Matthew iv. 1, that 'He was led *of the Spirit* into the wilderness, to be tempted.' He was deliberately led of God's Spirit into circumstances under which He was going to be tempted to sin. Then it follows that either, in this one point, He was *not* 'tempted like as we are;'—or else that as it was with the Elder Brother so it is with the younger children, and that we also, when occasion needs it, are deliberately led by God's Spirit into positions and circumstances when we shall be 'tempted of the devil.'

Now, why do our feelings revolt and rebel against this teaching; as, doubtless, they do with some, perhaps with many?

It is because we forget what temptation is. Temp-

tation is not sin. Temptation is not necessary evil. The hard problem is neither a sin nor an evil to the young pupil. If he solves it, it is a glory to him. Even if he fails, after honest endeavours, it leaves him no worse than he was before. Nay, it has done him good by pointing out wherein his dulness or ignorance lies. A good old writer says, 'Temptation is the raw material out of which sins are manufactured.' You may be brought face to face with the raw material, and you may say, 'I cannot work with such as this;' and so cast it behind you; and then no blast of sin or of evil will have passed over you, but, rather, you will have gained wisdom and experience out of the very temptation, and so you may be stronger and wiser than you ever would have been without that temptation.

And this view of the matter is fully borne out by a careful study of those sadly mistranslated words of St. James: 'God is not tempted of evil, neither tempteth He any man.' The exact sense of this passage is as follows. 'When temptation to evil comes in your way, let no one say that this evil comes from God. God is utterly unversed in evil. God cannot either make evil or send evil, in any way. There are times when, for the strengthening of your character, God allows you to stand face to face with some evil. But He does not tempt you with it. If you will only let Him bring out of your heart His instructions, you will not even feel tempted with it. If you do feel tempted, it is only your own

unchecked longing after the evil thing which drags or entices you into its snare.'

No; God's plan is this. First He teaches us what is lovable. Then His Spirit leads us into contact with the unlovely, in order to test and try us whether we have rightly learned the difference between the lovable and the unlovable. And if we, in this hour of temptation, place our hearts in communion with our Father's heart, we shall see with His eyes, and love what He loves, and hate what He hates. On the other hand, if we allow our own personal wishes to break the communion between us, then we shall forget His lessons, and shall imagine to be lovable what He sees to be hateful.

And this 'leading into temptation' is an absolutely necessary ingredient in all true education. As we have seen, Christ Himself was thus led. Three years afterwards He distinctly prayed for His disciples, and for us, that we might not be taken out of the world, but that we might be left in the midst of all its temptations. St. James, only a few verses before he warns us, as we have seen, against confusing the existence of temptations with God's leading us into them, distinctly bids us rejoice when we fall into every imaginable variety of temptation. He uses the same Greek word in both cases. The 13th verse is evidently only a return to the same idea as that of the 2nd. We may mourn when we *yield* to temptation. We are to rejoice when we are surrounded with temptation. Nay, 'blessed is he' who when he comes into temptation bears up and endures

through it. And why? Because, having by his patient endurance been proved true and trusty, he shall receive the crown of life which is promised to all who stand the test.

But now arises a question, which ought to be asked, and must be fairly answered.

If the entry into temptation be thus a part of God's will for us, and a needful portion of our education for Him; if we, like our Elder Brother, *can* only be made perfect by such means; if we are even told that a special blessedness is his who endures temptation; does it not seem inconsistent, nay, does it not seem almost a contradiction in terms, to teach us to pray, 'Lead us not into temptation'?

I think not. I think that both in what our Saviour said and did, we shall find abundant clues to the solving of this apparent difficulty.

For did not He also command us: 'Watch and pray, lest ye enter into temptation?' What is the meaning of these words? Clearly this,—that watchfulness and prayer will not only help us in time of temptation, but will oftentimes prevent our 'entering into' it. That is to say, we may be led to the very verge of temptation, but watchfulness and prayer will keep our hearts so near to God's heart, that we shall think with His thoughts and so shall instinctively refrain from, or put away from us, that which is no longer pleasant to our true selves, because we know that it is unlovely to Him.

But more. There is something deeper yet in this

petition. Did not our dear Lord Himself once act it out? Did He not Himself, twice at all events, yield to the same apparent inconsistency? What of that cry: 'Now is My soul troubled; what can I say? Father, save Me from this hour!' Oh, think of those words, coming, as they did, at the close of a life of self-devotion with but one end in view; coming out of the fullest self-consciousness of what that end involved for Him! 'Father, save Me from this hour!' There spoke the Man Christ Jesus: 'Lead Me not into this last most awful test!' And then, even with the cry, the revulsion of utter self-abnegation swept through His soul. Once more the Man Christ Jesus continued, 'Yet for this cause came I to this hour.' I have meant it all along. Though the flesh may shrink for a moment, yet My heart is one with Thy heart. 'Father, glorify Thy name!'—And in the same spirit, a little later, did not the same cry, 'Lead us not into temptation,' once more rise from His heart as 'Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me! Nevertheless, not My will, but Thine, be done.' Here we see, in the Man of men, a shrinking, yet not a rebellion; an instinctive human dread of the coming horror and agony; a cry, if it were possible, not to be led into it; and yet, mingled with it all, an absolute unity of will with His Father's will; an utter readiness to accept and to face any temptation, any trial, any test, to which it was actually necessary, for the perfection of His work, that He should be subjected.

And so a light, new perhaps to some of us, and more glorious than I can find words to describe, breaks forth on this petition. Read as we can now read it, I claim it as one of the most precious utterances of our Master. I see in it an eternal testimony to the absolute humanity of Him who knoweth our frame; who could feel for Himself that the spirit might be utterly ready, while the flesh was very weak; who in this way, as in all other ways, was tempted in *all* points like as we are; and so as a witness to us that, if we only would cling to our Father as He clave to His Father, we also, like Himself, might be tempted, 'yet without sin.' And, therefore, even as He practically prayed this petition at His sorest need, so also may we. We are fully justified in praying our Father not to lead us into temptation, so long as we also, as He did, couple our cry with loving, childlike submission to the loving Father's will.

'Father, save Me from this hour! Thy will be done!'

So prayed Jesus. So *may* pray,—so *must* pray, every child that loves its Father.

'Father! Thy will be done!' Yes: leave it all to Him to decide. He is wise and farsighted:—we, ignorant and blind. Oftentimes He will 'lead the blind by a way that they know not'—by a way that we should never have chosen for ourselves:—by a way that leads us not only into sorrow and pain and loss, but, rather, into doubt, perplexity, temptation. Never mind.

Leave it all to Him; and in that very act of self-surrender, the doubt will have done its work, the temptation will have been victoriously endured.

Yes; only leave it to Him; absolutely certain of one thing, and caring for nothing else. And that one thing is, the perfect certainty of the perfect fulfilment of His unchangeable law, that, together with the temptation, He, our own loving Father, will assuredly provide some way of escape, that we may be able to bear it.

XIV.

THE EVIL.

'But deliver us from evil.'—MATT. vi. 13.

THE first thing that I shall ask you to notice in this, the concluding petition in the Lord's Prayer, is the close connection in which it stands with the petition which immediately precedes it. Indeed, I strongly doubt whether we should not better understand the united sense of the apparently two requests, if we were to consider them as forming one petition only; for the two are linked together by a chain of logical reasoning which we are in danger of overlooking, so long as we treat them as two separate petitions for two separate needs. As we saw in the last sermon, our poor frail humanity is encouraged, not only by these words of our Master, but also by His own personal example, to cry to our Father, in the hour of our sorest trials, that if it be His loving will, He will spare us from the test which we fear we shall sink under. And then, not as an introduction of any new thought, but as the full development of the absolute sacrifice of our own wills

implied in our Lord's 'if it be possible,'—we go on to cry, '*But* deliver us from the evil.'

'But.' I want you to mark and cling to that first word. It carries out the same chain of thought as marked our Master's own cry:—'Father, save Me from this hour!' *But*—but it cannot be; 'for for this very cause came I unto this hour,' that I should meet the temptation, and by bearing it, rise to a truer height, and learn a better lesson, than if My human weakness were to wrest from Thee permission for the cup to pass away from Me. Even so does He, the tempted one, teach us here to pray:—'Father, lead us not into temptation: *But*,' forasmuch as this cannot be;—*but*, forasmuch as without the temptation our education could not be completed;—*but*, forasmuch as it is only by enduring the cross that we can win the crown,—therefore we would leave all question as to what tests are necessary in Thy loving Hands, only praying Thee that, when Thou hast seen fit to lead us into temptation, and to send us forth to do battle with evil, Thou wouldst help us to keep our heart one with Thy heart, and so 'deliver us from the evil' that we have to endure or to fight against.

What, then (and this is what we must specially consider to-day)—what is 'The Evil,' from which we pray to be delivered? You will notice that I speak of it as *the* evil; and I do so because this is the form in which our Lord spoke of it, specially employing the definite article, which our translation most unfortunately

omits. Unfortunately, I say; because a general prayer to be delivered from 'evil,' leaves it pretty much open to our own individual minds to decide wherein 'evil' consists; whereas if we hold fast by our Master's idea of '*the evil*,' we shall be driven to try and attain to the mind of Christ, by finding out what was '*the*' one thing which alone He signalises to us by the name of 'The Evil.'

Some have considered that the Greek word is in the masculine gender, and signifies 'the evil one.' But our best commentators, both ancient and modern, agree that the expression must not be thus limited. And I venture to think that it is far more in accordance with the general spirit of our Lord's life and teaching, that we should fix our whole minds upon getting a clear idea as to what does actually constitute evil, in itself and for itself, rather than allow them to be distracted by vague notions as to a personal source of evil, outside of ourselves, upon whose shoulders I fear that people in general, following in the footsteps of Eve, are far too ready to lay the blame of what they have done when, as St. James more accurately warns us, 'we are led astray *of our own lusts*, and enticed.'

What, then, I repeat, was *the one* thing which was in our Master's mind when He designated it as '*The Evil*'?

Once more, I think the explanation in our catechism gives us the best possible answer to this question, when it defines it in the two scriptural words, '*Everlasting Death*.'

Now, what do we mean by 'everlasting death'? Clearly, it is something that comes to us in this life; for St. Paul says, 'The *wages* of sin is death;' and wages are paid a man from time to time, as his work goes on; not all in one lump sum (so to speak), when his service is finished and complete.

No. Whatever everlasting life is, everlasting death must be the exact reverse of it. And as our Lord Himself tells us (John xvii. 3) that eternal life consists in the knowledge of God, it follows that eternal death must be defined as the ignorance of God. Both are states of heart and mind, which may exist in a man while here alive on earth. Both are states of heart and mind, which may go on increasing and extending during this life; the spirit developing into fuller and ever fuller knowledge and life, or growing duller and colder and harder, and so sinking into deeper and ever deeper ignorance and death. And, as increasing knowledge of God brings increasing love and longing to be near Him, so increasing ignorance brings increasing distaste to and separation from Him.

And this last is what I think Jesus meant by '*The* Evil.' I prefer not to use the word 'sin,' because I believe that this word is so common that it often conveys a vague and general idea only to many minds. I prefer to define what sin is clearly, and as I think Jesus would have defined it. '*The* evil' is, separation from our Father.

Now, in order to enter more fully into what this

means, let us go back to our last sermon. It is necessary for us, after having been instructed in the love we owe to our Father, to be put to the test, whether or no we have learned to know God as He is, and to love Him because He is such. Therefore we are led face to face with temptation. This does not necessarily involve any evil whatever. If we look the temptation steadfastly in the face, and, holding tightly by our Father's hand, call to remembrance the instructions we have had concerning His love, then the temptation will cause us no evil, but rather good, for it will have proved us to be true and trusty, and will have given us experience for the future. But if, on the other hand, we let go of our Father, if we forget that He is our Father, and that we both must and can act like His children, then, at once, our hearts and wills are separated from His heart and will, and 'The Evil' comes upon us like a mighty and irresistible flood.

And this 'evil' is the one and only thing which we need to dread. Remember what we spoke of before, when we were illustrating the true idea of forgiveness. Before we can pray this petition as our Lord prayed it, we must have learned to distinguish between the desire to escape a possible hell hereafter, and the longing never to be separated from our Father here. Before we can clearly see how to define 'evil,' we must have advanced beyond the first vague cries for mercy, and have learned the spirit of this whole prayer, which is, an unsatisfiable yearning after holiness, after child-

likeness. One of our truest and deepest modern preachers once spoke thus :—'*A man whose religion lies chiefly in the sense of forgiveness, does not thereby rise into integrity of character.*' The heart which is half turned to God fears punishment hereafter. The heart which is *really* turned to God fears nothing but separation from Him, here and now; for that, and that only, is spiritual, or eternal, death—that and that only, is what Jesus called 'The Evil.'

Yes; I repeat it. Separation from our Father is *the* one and only 'evil' in the universe.

I know full well that human nature, in its selfishness and weakness, deems many things 'evil' which are merely sad and painful. And some might think that in this petition we might be permitted to include prayers against such seeming 'evils' as pain, or loss, or death. But I cannot admit this to be permissible. We have seen before that all these things form a part of our Father's 'will' concerning us, and may well, at some time or another, constitute an absolutely necessary portion of our 'daily bread.' And therefore I cannot think that in our Lord's mind any one of these things, or any one of the ten thousand hard and bitter things that go to make up the sum of our lives, is to be included in this prayer to be delivered from 'The Evil.'

For, consider for a moment, what is the true meaning of 'evil.'

I can find but one definition that will meet every

imaginable case. I would say that that is 'evil' which necessarily produces pain *in the end.*

If anything which inflicts pain or suffering *for a time*, is calculated to result in far greater happiness or well-being *in the end*, I think we have no right to designate the short and temporary action of that pain as 'evil.'

Oh, no! Though selfish, easeloving human nature may imagine otherwise, let us feel quite sure that, as the world is constituted at present, pain is one of the greatest blessings that exist.

Ask any doctor, and he will tell you so. A sharply localised pain shows the exact seat of disease, where it can be met and combated. How often do we say of very little children, 'Poor little things: they can't tell us where they feel the pain!' How often does a skilful physician look hopelessly upon a case where the patient just painlessly fades away! The absence of pain, in disease, or its sudden cessation, is generally one of the very worst symptoms.

So is it also with regard to our spiritual lives. Trials are no more evils than temptation is sin. Sorrow, pain, struggle, conflict, shame, self-loathing, all these and the myriad other forms of pain through which God's children *must* pass, are simply signs of some special disease being at work in our spiritual constitutions. They tell us that something is wrong with the eternal life within us: that it is being starved, or impeded in its circulation, or enfeebled in some way or other. Happy are they

who know what these sorrows are. I don't believe that any Christian soul ever travels for any length of time along a smooth path of flowers. I distrust the experience of any soul whose current of Christian life flows smooth and even, never broken by rough rocks which obstruct its course. I would not choose for myself, or for anyone, a spiritual life free from doubts and fears, nay, from 'strong crying and tears.' God help those souls that 'are at ease in Zion.' God help the self-complacent in any shape. Our Brother's own education could not be completed without the incessant presence of this needful element of pain. He 'learned obedience by the things which He suffered.' If any of us deem that we are learning without suffering, that our education can be perfected by other means than were needed for Him, believe me, the reason is that our hearts are in danger of a death that may be quiet and calm and painless, but is no less sure and certain at the last.

Therefore, let us not pray against pain, *as such*. Let us not even pray against any particular form of pain, *as such*. Never let us imagine that such pains form any part of 'the evil' from which we long to be delivered. Rather let us leave every detail in our Father's hands. When the pain comes, let us not say, 'Father, save me from this evil;' but 'Father, help me to find out the evil which has caused this pain. Father, do not remove the pain, until the evil which makes the pain come has been thoroughly purged and cured.'

And so we see how this closing petition only re-echoes the same cry which, as we have said, has prompted every one of the other petitions.

One cry, in many tones, from a child to a Father, that the child may grow up more and more like to its Father.

'Father, hallowed be Thy name.' Deliver us from the evil of ignorance of Thee as our Father of absolute love.

'Father, Thy kingdom come.' Deliver us from the evil of separating our obedience from Thy loving laws.

'Father, Thy will be done.' Deliver us from the evil of separating our wills from Thine.

'Father, give us our bread for this day.' Deliver us from the evil of separating our thoughts from Thee, while seeking food for our bodies, or knowledge for our souls.

'Father, forgive us our debts.' Deliver us from the evil of separating our love from Thee.

In one word, Father, deliver us from '*The Evil*' of not really knowing, loving, and trusting Thee as our Father.

TEN-MINUTE SERMONS.

I.

'WHILE YET YOUNG.'

'Josiah was eight years old when he began to reign; and . . . in the eighth year of his reign, WHILE HE WAS YET YOUNG, he began to seek after the God of David his father.'—2 CHRON. xxxiv. 1, 3.

THERE is an old saying, which tells us that 'as the twig is bent, so the tree is inclined.' Never was there a more true, or a more solemn, saying. Train the young branch, or secure the young sapling, in a given position, and in a few years it will assume that position, and keep it, as a matter of course, and without further effort. But wait only for those few years, and the fibres of the wood, even while they are yet young, have selected their own direction in which to grow; and it will take a violent effort on your part, and a sad tearing and straining of the young grain, to alter that direction. Wait yet a few years more, and you may break, and

destroy, but you can no longer change, or even modify but a little, the natural direction of the growth.

Even so is it in every point, with the heart and mind of man. In our early years, the wise and tender parent and teacher will gently *train* the young shoot in a certain direction. If this is rightly done, that direction is rarely or never departed from. But wait a few years, and let the golden time of childhood fleet by, and the young sapling will need far sterner treatment; and, after all, will *never* be so completely trained as if the training had been applied while it was still supple and pliant. Wait yet a few years more;—let the girl or boy begin to feel the budding powers of manhood or womanhood swelling within them;—and then training has wellnigh become a thing of the past. The mind has chosen its own direction; and nothing but a complete breaking up of its life can alter that direction.

Oh, how many thousands and millions of lost lives have been lost, simply because their parents and friends failed to train their spirits wisely and tenderly, 'while they were yet young!'

Now, I have a special reason for bringing out this thought on the present occasion. I want to give my words a very wide and deep signification. I have been led to speak thus, in view of the notice given, that a Confirmation will be held for this district, in the month of July; and I want to impress upon all, parents and young people alike, that here is an exceptional opportunity put in their way, for having young minds trained

in a God-fearing direction; for getting the hearts of the young people around us led, like Josiah, 'to seek after God, while they are yet young.'

And I do want to arouse both young people and parents to feel the solemn importance of seeking that training which will thus be placed within their reach.

Confirmation has, hitherto (especially in country districts) been made far too light of. The day has been little more than a holiday for the young folk; and there has been far too small an effort, on the part of the clergy, to impress the tender minds with the deep significance of the occasion. But times are changed; and people's feelings are changing also; and Confirmation is beginning to be understood in its true light;—as being, not a mere form: not the mere relic of an ancient ceremony, which carries along with it no message to our hearts; but, rather, as being a golden opportunity for bringing the young heart, just old enough to be able really to desire what is right, and not yet old enough to have been hopelessly trained in the direction of the world alone,—into contact with the experience, and careful instruction, of those who have made such instruction a lifelong study.

I do not hesitate to say, from my own experience (in which I only repeat the experience of every minister who has given himself to this subject), that in the quiet preparation of the few weeks before Confirmation, it *is* possible to make an impression upon the young heart,

which not even subsequent backslidings and forgetfulness will ever entirely obliterate.

Therefore it is that I urge all, young and old, to consider the matter in this point of view. I ask one and all to look upon Confirmation as a reality, not as a mere form. Believe me; if I did not *know* it to be a reality, I would not address you thus.

I ask the young then, to look upon it as the most solemn, and the most blessed, opportunity of all their lives hitherto. Most solemn; because they are permitted openly to declare that they do, at the bottom of their hearts, despite of much that is wrong, thoughtless, and vain in those hearts—nevertheless earnestly and honestly desire to be, and to continue, true Christian youths and maidens now; true Christian men and women hereafter. Most blessed;—because just in proportion as we try to 'draw nigh unto God,' just in the same proportion does He 'draw nigh unto us.' And, as in the solemn feelings of the Confirmation Day, rightly understood, and duly prepared for, the young heart does make an effort to draw closer to God than it has ever done before—does, 'while it is still young, set itself to seek God'—so, most assuredly, does God, at the same time and place, fulfil His part of the covenant, by specially drawing nigh, in a manner, and to a degree, never previously granted to that heart. So, too, most assuredly, to those who thus seek Him, 'while they are yet young, is that other promise fulfilled, 'I love them that love Me, and those that seek Me early shall find Me.'

And I appeal to the parents also. Many, perhaps most of you, have neither the time, nor the systematic knowledge of Scripture, which alone can enable you to give your children the amount of instruction which they need. They have grown too old for the Sunday School; nor is the Sunday School the best place for instruction of this kind, which requires the assistance of quiet, and oftentimes private and individual conversation, to give it a fair chance of really reaching the heart. I ask you, then, as you value your children's future lives—as you desire to be able, some future day, fearlessly to meet the searching question, 'Didst thou do all that was honestly in thy power to have thy child taught of Me?'—as you wish to stand before God innocent of the crime of the neglected spiritual education of those whom you profess to love so dearly—I ask you to aid, by your influence, and by your prayers—those who, during the next two months will be engaged in trying to help your young ones to a clearer knowledge of their heavenly Father's Love.

II.

THE TRUE MEASURE OF LIFE.

'How old art thou?'—GEN. xlvii. 8.

THERE is an old saying which tells us that 'many a true word is spoken in jest.' And so it oftentimes undoubtedly is. Many a word drops from our lips, as a matter of old habit, or social custom, which contains within itself a truth far deeper and broader than we ever dream of attaching to it.

Such an old conventional custom is it which, on New Year's Day, when we wish each other a 'happy new year,' prompts us to add the kindly phrase, 'and *many* of them.' Such an old custom is it which prompts us, on the birthdays of our friends, to wish them, even when they are already well advanced in years '*many* happy returns of the day.'

I believe that these old customary expressions are dictated to us by an instinct which is truer-sighted than much of our boasted reason. I believe that they contain a truth, little dreamed of as they lightly pass our lips, but which is one of the most solemn and most beautiful truths that human heart can conceive.

Let me try and tell you, this New Year's Tide, what that truth seems to me to be.

There can be no doubt that the Bible always speaks of long life as being specially promised by God to those who love and serve Him. In the ninety-first Psalm we are told that the heart which has taken God for a refuge and a fortress shall be 'satisfied with long life.' In the third chapter of Proverbs we are told that to forget not the law, and to keep the commandments, of Wisdom shall add to us 'length of days and long life.' Again (to quote no further passages), we are told that the promise attached to the observance of the fifth commandment is that our 'days shall be long.'

And yet, as a matter of fact, we do not find that those who love God, and honour their parents, live longer than others. Nay, we even have an old saying that 'those whom God loves die young.' And we often feel that long life is not always such a very desirable thing, as it not seldom only means a more protracted endurance of pain, weakness, sorrow, poverty, and loss of those nearest and dearest to us, one after another.

How can we reconcile these two seemingly contradictory states of feeling?

Thus, dear friends:—by remembering that God measures time and life by a very different standard from that which we generally employ. We count hours by clocks and watches. We count days and years by the movement of the earth in space. But if there were no revolving earth, and if there were no central sun, we

should have no such artificial divisions of time as these. Time would then have to be measured as God measures it. With Him 'one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.' Why? Because God measures time only by the number of thoughts which are thought, or by the amount of work which has been done. We ourselves often instinctively measure time by the same standard. We judge of days as being 'short' and 'long,' by pretty nearly the same rule as God uses. For believe me; *thought* is the only true measure of time; *work* is the only true standard of life. The heart that has thought much about God, the hands and the lips that have worked much for God, are old already, however few be the years, as men count years, that they have loved and laboured. The heart that has loved little, the brain that has thought little, the tongue that has spoken little, the hands that have wrought little, about God, and for God's sake, these are still young, still in their infancy, although the hoary head of their owner may show the approach of the threescore years and ten. For, in a word:—Life is not days and years. Life is Love and Labour.

And this shows us the meaning of a difficult passage in Isaiah lxv. 20 which tells us that 'the child shall die a hundred years old; but the sinner being a hundred years old shall be accursed' (that is, separated from God). The soul that is young, as man counts youth, if it has set itself early to know God, may be as old, according to God's reckoning, as an ordinary man of a

hundred years old, who has never cared much about God. The soul that has lived only for that strange mixture of selfishness and morality which nowadays is called 'respectability,' may live for a hundred years of the Earth's journey round the Sun, and yet be only an 'infant of days,' unwilling at first, unable at last, either to love God, or to work for Him.

Bearing in mind, then, that when I speak of Life, I mean Love and Labour, I most earnestly desire to wish my readers and parishioners, not only 'a Happy New Year,' but also 'many' of them. And I would desire to seize this opportunity of entreating overyone who hears these words, to take my text as their New Year's motto, and to ask their own souls, truthfully and earnestly, 'How old art *thou*?'

Here, as in everything else, we may fairly trace out an exact parallel between the stages of bodily life and of spirit life. The unborn child is alive; but it has no power of loving and labouring, and therefore we never look upon its existence as being really 'life,' and we count our ages from the day on which we were born. Even so there are souls among us—souls, I doubt not, of 'respectable' and moral men and women—which have not as yet risen to the conception of the possibility of actual love to God, and work for God. Such souls only exist; they do not '*live*.' They are yet unborn.

Then, after the child is born, how long is the babyhood, how wearisome the early school-time! So again with our souls. They are not born full-grown Christian

souls all in a day. Long is indeed our boyhood, in which we first learn to stammer, and then to love, the name of 'Father.' Long is the weary school-time, while, still in the lower classes of God's world-school, we labour, and grow very tired and sad, over the hard lessons set us. Still, this alone is life. From love to labour; and from labour ascending to more love; moving up from class to class, from one kind of work to another, in proportion to our willingness to learn. *This*, I repeat it, and this alone, is what God calls life.

Dear brother or sister that hears these words,—in what stage of this growth are you? As a spiritual being 'How old art thou?'

You, trifler of many years' standing? You, cynical critic, with the clear head and the cold, unloving heart? You, man or woman, living the existence of absolute negation, doing no harm, as you flatter yourself, but most assuredly trying to do no good, and caring only to lead your life as pleasantly and smoothly as possible! Judged by God's measure, 'How old art *thou*?'

You, respectable, moral, church or chapel-goer again, it may be, of many years' standing as such; bearing an honourable name among your neighbours, but still living for yourself and your own bodily wants or pleasures alone;—look at your heart, I pray you, by the true measure of life. Your love, such as it is, is for yourself and your family only. Your labour, however great it may be, is again only for yourself and for them: never for God! How old art *thou*?

You, also, self-satisfied professor of religion, harsh judge of the failings and the sins of others; still harsher judge of the opinions of others; measuring God and God's Love, by the petty standard of your own narrowness and lovelessness! If life be love,—if life be work,—can it be that *your* life has not yet even begun? God help you honestly, at last, to ask your own soul, this night, the awful question, 'How *old* art thou?'

And you, too, humble, downhearted groper in darkness! You, trustful, childlike, feeler after God! You, poor soul, distrustful of your own wisdom, your own strength, your own virtue! Take heart, and look upwards and onwards. Such thoughts as you think are the true measure of Life. Such work as you try to do is God's standard of being. Work and strive on, although no result appear. Pray and trust on, though no visible answer be granted you. That your Father sets you such hard lessons is a proof that you have grown older than you were when easier ones sufficed. The corn is ripening in the ear; and immediately the harvest is fully ripe, the sickle shall be put in, and the Eternal Harvest Home be sung.

To some of those who hear these words it may be assumed as certain that the Angel Messenger will have come before next New Year's Day returns. Once more, then, I ask, How old art thou? If the Messenger comes, what message will he bear?

Will it be, 'Child, thou hast refused to learn thy

Father's lessons here! Thou hast idled and trifled; Thou hast been stubborn and rebellious! Thou hast closed thine eyes and hardened thine heart! Thou hast compelled thy Father to place thee in another school, where thy lessons will be harder, and even less pleasant than they were here?'

Or will it be, 'Child, thou hast learned the lessons that thy childhood's school-time was meant to teach thee. Thou hast learned the first rudiments of true knowledge. Thou has learned to forget self in Love and Labour. Come Home, now. Thy Father wants thee to work for Him elsewhere. Childhood and school-time are over. Thou hast grown to be a man. Come, now, and in perfect love, and "work without weariness," enter upon thy true place in God's universe; enter into the fulness of Life?'

God grant you and me some day, be it sooner or later, to hear His last earthly message in *these* words!

III.

COMMUNION.[1]

'And truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ.'—1 JOHN i. 3.

IN accepting your Vicar's invitation to speak to you the first words which will have been uttered from the pulpit of this Church, now, after the lapse of fifty years, renovated, and, as we may say, re-dedicated this day to God's service, I have pondered much how best to harmonise the thoughts which necessarily occur on such an occasion, with those other thoughts which specially centre round that Holy Service, which I greatly rejoice has been selected, in all its simplicity, to be *the* Opening Service of to-day.

And it seems to me that I cannot do better than ask you to consider very earnestly the true teaching of the words which I have just read to you.

I. Now, the first point to which I have to call your attention is, that the word here translated '*fellowship*' is absolutely the same as that which is translated

[1] This Sermon was preached at the re-opening of Millbrook Parish Church, after complete renovation and re-decoration, on January 10, 1878.

'*communion*,' in other parts of the New Testament. Indeed, our translators appear to have used the two words as mutually convertible. Thus, in 2 Cor. xiii. 14 and Phil. ii. 1, the same Greek word is rendered 'the communion of the Holy Spirit' and 'fellowship of the Spirit,' in the two respective passages. Therefore the true meaning of our text will be at least equally well expressed in English, if we render it, 'our *communion* is with' God, and with the Lord Jesus Christ.

II. Then, as a second point, I must ask you to be sure that you clearly understand the necessary significance of the word '*communion*.' In the very essence of things, this word *must* signify something that is shared mutually by two parties. It may signify the sharing in a common life and a common work; such as that (which was the original meaning of the word) of two soldiers serving in the same campaign, living under the same tent, having all their dangers and duties in common. Or it may signify mutual interchange of thought and thought, heart and heart, love and love. But in no case can '*communion*' ever signify the imparting of something from one person to another, without a return of some kind being made by the first receiver to the first giver; so that each party to the '*communion*' is rendered at one and the same moment both giver and receiver.

I do most earnestly pray you clearly to realise these two positions; and then to bear in mind that it is by this idea that St. John here describes his idea of true

Christian Life. It must be a *communion.* It must be a state of heart in which we can meet our Father, and our Brother, face to face, on an equal footing; all fear, all formal ceremony apart; knowing that we are sharing with them a Common Life, a Common Work; mutually interchanging with them thought and thought, speech and speech, heart and heart, love and love.

I press upon you this double aspect of the word 'communion,' which constitutes us givers of something that God needs, as well as receivers of something that we need. In the early days of Christian life, the heart tends to be somewhat selfish. We feel the preciousness of the treasure which we have won. We are so wrapt up in the joy of possessing, that we do not yet realise that other joy of being possessed. The soul in the days of its first love can cry 'My beloved is mine'; but it is only the true bride-soul which can add 'and I am His.' So, too, we are at first so full of the joy of knowing God, that we forget there is something higher still; as St. Paul shows us when he says, 'But now, after that ye have known God,' and then he checks himself, as though feeling that he had employed too low an expression, and so goes on to add, 'or, rather, are known of Him.'

Oh, believe me, in the full realisation of this double aspect of our relationship to, and connection with, our Father and our Lord, lies the possibility of our comprehending the full significance of the lesson of our

text. The life of the Christian is a life of conscious personal communion. The life which is not a life of striving after this personal and conscious communion, *is not the life of a Christian.*

And now I turn to another passage in which the selfsame word occurs. St. Paul says: 'The bread which we break, is it not the Communion of the Body of Christ? The cup which we bless, is it not the Communion of the Blood of Christ?' I repeat, that the word here used for '*Communion*' is the same as that which we have just been illustrating. As one who believes that the Apostles weighed deeply and solemnly the true meaning of every word which they employed, I must believe that St. Paul, when he selected this word in connection with the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, distinctly intended it to convey all the meanings which I have been endeavouring to attach to it.

Therefore, in the face of this Scripture expression, I cannot help holding (not as a theologian, but merely as an honest student of plain Bible words), that in the case of every earnest receiver of the Lord's Supper there is a true act of communion performed. I must believe that there is an actual interchange of heart and heart, of life and life, between the communicant and Christ Himself. I must believe that there is a receiving, as well as a giving. I must believe that there is a taking into the heart of something that He gives, as well as an offering to Him of something that comes from us. I must believe that there is a breathing out

of self, a breathing out of our own emptiness, to be replaced, *at the same moment*, by His fulness.

Therefore, once more, while on the one hand I repudiate as a mere figment of man's invention all ideas of a carnalised or localised presence of Christ, limited to the consecrated element, so, on the other hand, I repudiate as infinitely more dangerous to the real life of the soul (because utterly destructive of the true idea of '*Communion*') any teaching which degrades the Lord's Supper to the level of a mere memorial-feast. I assert that if such a teaching be true, then the very name of 'Holy Communion' is a delusion and a mockery. I assert that if it be only a memorial, then St. Paul was wrong in applying to it the name of 'Communion'; for while a 'memorial' feast signifies only the offering of our own tender love and gratitude to Christ for all His love to us, a 'Communion' feast *must*, by its very name, imply that He is present to hold mutual communion, or interchange of word and love, with us.

And, yet once more, therefore do I hold that the presence here to be felt by us is a real one—real in the true sense of the word, namely, that it is a *thing* which has an actual existence within the heart. The heart longing for fellowship, longing for mutuality, longing to hear some message of love from a Father and a Brother, is warranted in believing that this fellowship is more thoroughly realised and perfected at the Lord's Table than at any other time, or in any

other way. Therefore I do most earnestly entreat *all* who desire to attain to the realisation of the Communion of the Father and of His Son, to lose no opportunity of *thus* endeavouring more and more fully to grow into that fellowship. Therefore do I most solemnly and earnestly warn all outward professing Christians, *all* regular churchgoers, who deliberately accept for themselves the position of Non-Communicants, that they are at the same time deliberately accepting for themselves the position of spiritual emptiness and barrenness. Therefore do I, if possible yet more sadly and tenderly, desire to warn all seldom or occasional Communicants of the great danger of their course. They are 'neither cold nor hot.' It might be better for them to be cold, rather than to be lukewarm. God says, 'open thy mouth *wide*, and I will fill it.' They only open their mouths a little way, and God *cannot* fill them; their hearts also deliberately choosing for themselves at all events comparative emptiness and barrenness.

Now, why do I speak thus to you to-day? Is it just because I want to lead you to become Communicants, or more regular Communicants? Is it only because I mourn over the present habitual neglect of the Lord's Table among regular churchgoers, and desire to seize this opportunity for forcing upon you my views upon the subject?

No. Most decidedly that is not my reason. It lies deeper than that. It is because I, together with

every thinking and working minister of God's word, am compelled day by day to mourn over the shallowness—shall I call it the veneer ?—of our respectable, but loveless, and therefore godless, religious profession. I know this is an awful choice of words; but I do not shrink from it. Our social respectability is mostly godless—not ungodly, but godless. It is a mere negation. We are respectable, because it pays, not because we care about God. We are religious, because it is respectable to be so. Therefore it is that utter lovelessness has settled down, like a thick cloud, upon the lives of so many respectable and even professedly religious persons. And therefore it is that we have so few communicants. Absence from the Lord's Table, or seldom Communion, is a consequence, not a cause; a consequence of our worship of mere social moralities; a consequence of our never giving one thought to the possibility of realising for ourselves the teaching of our text; a consequence of our having no notion that we may, and that we *must*, desire to enter into fellowship with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.

I pray you, then, take this as the starting-point, from one side, as well as the goal to which your course of life must ultimately return from the other side:—the personal faith in a personal Father and personal Christ; a Father and a Brother not far off, but 'very nigh thee;'—a Father and a Brother with whom, consequently, a personal Communion is a necessity, just because it is a possibility.

Without *this* faith our lives may be respectable, moral, harmless, and even honourable; and yet those lives will be practically godless. And as the lives have been godless, godless also will be even the quiet and untroubled deathbed; quiet and untroubled, not as the natural outcome of the sure and certain persuasion that 'we know in whom we have believed,' but simply by reason of the physical apathy and torpor that dulls every nerve, and renders us indifferent to all surroundings.

On the other hand, with this personal faith in a personal love that guides and sustains us, our souls will sooner or later grow out of the swaddling clothes of religious selfishness and self-complacency which more or less enshroud the form of every baby Christian; and, receiving ever more and more fresh supplies of life by a realised Communion 'with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ,' we shall be enabled, sooner or later, to comprehend the words which immediately follow our text:—'and these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full.'

IV.

LOOKING BACKWARDS.

A NEW YEAR'S SERMON.

'Thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness; to humble thee, and to prove thee; to know what was in thy heart, whether thou wouldst keep His commandments or no. And he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know; that He might make thee know that man doth not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord doth man live.'—DEUT. viii. 2–5.

'A HAPPY New Year! A very Happy New Year!'

Let us very earnestly—how earnestly and how deeply perhaps few of those whom we address can even guess at—re-echo the good old New Year's wish:—'A very Happy New Year' to each and all. Happy, with just so much of earthly brightness as our Father sees is really good for each of us; happy, above all, in the power of realising His Loving Hand ordering alike all our days, whether bright or dark.

I do not know any portion of that Father's message to His children that is better calculated to show us how 'A Happy New Year' can really be enjoyed by one and all, than the words which I have taken as our

motto. Let us look at them carefully, and try and enter into their teaching.

Imagine a traveller, long absent from his home and all nearest and dearest to him. After long years he is on his return. His home lies beyond a lofty and rugged chain of mountains, which he has to climb. Earnestly he presses onward, seldom looking before him or around him, for when he does so the path only appears steeper than ever, the distant peaks seem farther off than ever, the lowering cliffs and precipices seem to stand as hopeless obstacles in his way. But at times he pauses to take needful refreshment, or welcome rest, and then he instinctively turns round and surveys the portion of his journey already accomplished; and gazing on the difficulties already surmounted, gains heart and hope to attack those which still await him. It is just so on our journey through life. It is not good too often to look *forward* to the possible difficulties of the future; but it is good, at times, to pause, and turn, and look *back* over the way which we have already travelled. And no time is better than the present. New Year's Day has been called 'Everybody's Birthday' and it is good on such a day as this to cast our glance backward over the road we have been travelling since our last anniversary. There is many an incident in our past lives—there may have been incidents in the past year—which we scarcely observed, or failed to understand the true bearing of, as we passed them by. Standing still, and looking back upon them from our present vantage-ground, perhaps

we can see them clearer, and comprehend their relative position to the other parts of our journey better than we could before. And, just in proportion as we do thus understand them, so will they all whisper to us one and the same lesson, the lesson which God tried to teach the Israelites in the wilderness; the lesson which the unchangeable Father of all is trying to teach every one of us His children now.

How strange it seems sometimes, that long sojourn of the Israelites in the wilderness! Forty weary years did they occupy in travelling a distance which, at the rate of a mile a day, need only have taken up one year. Up and down, backwards and forwards, were they led, under Divine direction. Sometimes nearly home, then again off on another course; almost at Canaan, yet not suffered to enter into it. And why was this so? Because they were not yet fit to take possession of the land. Four hundred years of slavery and idolatry had made them slaves and cowards. It would have been a cruel kindness to have let them cross Jordan at once. They would soon have become subservient to, and mingled with, the idolatrous native tribes. No. God led them about till the old coward generation had died out, and a new generation—hardy, fearless, inured to peril and want—had grown up; and then directly they were fit for Canaan, God allowed them to enter it.

Let us clearly understand this. The forty years' wandering was not inflicted in anger, but in love. It was not to 'punish,' but to 'chasten.' It was not the

lash of a taskmaster's whip, but it was the necessary school-time ordained by an Educating Father. God led them all those years in the wilderness *to humble them*, to make them feel their own weakness; *to prove them*, whether they were cowardly children or brave men; *to know what was in their heart*, whether they were still weak, unprincipled idolaters, or whether they would manfully adhere to the commandments of their God. He allowed them to hunger, and to feel that they were unable to supply their own wants, and then He supplied them with food, which came they knew not whence. Finally, even as a Father chastens—*i.e.* tries to make pure and harmless—a son whom he loves, even so did the Lord God chasten them.

Now does not every word I have used find an echo in each of our hearts, this New Year's Tide? Is not this, indeed, 'the story of our lives from year to year'? What is the whole of our lives, indeed, but one long series of wanderings in a wilderness? Sometimes our road leads us through a great and weary land where no water is. Sometimes we are compelled to wander up and down vast valleys and mountain passes, where large crags frown above our heads and threaten to overwhelm us. Sometimes our path leads us to green oases in the midst of the desert, where a pure spring of water and waving palm-trees beckon us to rest a while; but only for a while, for the weird is on us, and we must travel again. Sometimes we get, or seem to get, very near to our Canaan, and we hope the toilsome

journey is wellnigh over, and joy and happiness attained at last. Then, once more, our course turns aside, and the howling wilderness yet again claims our footsteps. Let us not fancy that it is blind chance, or the force of circumstances, which brings about all this.

No; it is our Father, of a set purpose and deliberate plan, laying before us a series of different lessons, leading us all these years through the wilderness, until the old faithless, heathenish, generation of thoughts has died out within us, and the newer and better generation of manly, and therefore godly, thoughts has grown up strong within us. It is to allow these time to grow up that He keeps us waiting; it is to make these true and trusty that He humbles us and proves us, to know whether we are willing to keep His commandments rather than follow our own inclinations—in a word, whether we are ready to enter into the Promised Land.

Therefore, also, does our Father suffer us to hunger. Oh, the great and terrible hunger of the heart! Where some dearest object, whereon our soul is wont to feed, is taken away; how terrible is the hunger then! When we crave, and long, and pray, long day after day, for some blessing, whether temporal or spiritual, which is withheld from us, how terrible is the hunger then! When the dark hour comes, when hope and faith alike seem lost, how terrible is the hunger then! When we have played the prodigal, and wasted our Father's gifts, and at last come to ourselves, and

find that we have nothing left but the husks of worldly pleasure, or worldly morality, to fill our hearts with, how terrible is the hunger then! All these, and many other kinds of hunger, does God suffer us to feel, until at times it seems as if there were nothing left for us but to let go our faith, and lay us down to die in despair!

And then! 'When the night is darkest, the dawn is nearest.' 'When the pain is sorest, the rest is nighest at hand.' Then—when by means of this great hunger we have learnt the lesson that we cannot supply our own wants—then, from somewhere unknown to us, some quarter least dreamed of by us, the manna comes, to restore life and hope to the drooping soul. Ay. Is not this indeed the 'story of our lives from year to year'? Look back and see. Has it not been ever so? And from what has been, learn what will be. He has said, 'I am Jehovah; I change not.' As He has led us in the past, so will He lead us in the future also. Forty years were needed to teach the Israelites their lesson. Strange, doubtless, it seemed to them at the time; but when it was all a thing of the past, they could look back and see 'the reason why' of many a hard trial which sorely puzzled them at the time.

So with us. Thus 'looking back' from a new year's vantage-point, we can see the bearings of many a bit of the road beneath us which sadly perplexed us as we travelled past it.

Thus 'looking back' we can see many an error,

many an achieved success, and we can learn lessons from all. Thus 'looking back' we can see that we have not travelled the road alone; but that ever by our side, as by the side of the gallant young Jews of old in the midst of the burning fiery furnace, there has been the form of Another, the form of the Son of Man, the form of a dear Human Brother, the form of Him Who, as our Christmastide has just been witnessing to us, was in *all* points 'made like unto His brethren,' and Who has promised that He will be with us 'all the days' of our life—dark days and bright days alike—to sympathise, to strengthen, and to bless. Lastly, thus 'looking back' we can learn the lesson that these lives of ours are not a tangled mass of unconnected threads, but that they form one whole, connected scheme or pattern from the beginning to the end, and that this scheme is the outcome of the perfect love and perfect wisdom of Him in Whom we live, and move, and have our being—Him, Who is no cold impersonal abstraction of creative law, but a living, loving, educating, personal Father.

In this faith, come what may, the trusting heart is sure to find a truly happy New Year, in simply living out the spirit of that sweet verse:—

> So long Thy love hath blest me, sure it still
> Will guide me on,
> O'er moor and fen, o'er crag and torrent, till
> The night is gone;
> And with the dawn those angel faces smile
> Which I have loved long since, and lost awhile.

V.

GOD'S JUDGMENTS.

I.

'When Thy judgments are in the earth the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness.'—ISAIAH xxvi. 9.

THERE is undoubtedly a deep and widely spread feeling among us, that the proper sphere of the Pulpit lies quite outside of what we call the world of politics. I shall not now stop to inquire minutely into the cause and origin of this feeling. Suffice it to say that while, in one sense, it is most right and true, in another sense it may become most wrong and dangerous.

In one sense it is most true. With what are called 'politics,' so far as they are connected with party strifes, party names, and party opinions, I think that a clergyman has absolutely no concern whatever. So long as 'politics' signify nothing more than what a given party in the State considers to be the most expedient course to be pursued under existing circumstances, I most heartily agree with those who think that the Pulpit ought to preserve entire silence upon such matters.

But there is a sense in which I think that the feeling to which I have alluded is capable of becoming wrong, and even dangerous to our own spiritual lives.

In its original meaning, the word 'politics' was invented, more than two thousand years ago, to signify not that which may appear expedient for the moment, but that which is for the true and lasting good of the State. In a word, while party politics are the exponents of man's expediency, true politics are the exponents of God's eternal laws of right and wrong. With politics, in this sense, the preacher is most deeply concerned.

It was so in the times of old. Take the book of Isaiah, for example. Isaiah was, emphatically, a political preacher:—that is to say, he seized on all the passing political events of his time, showed how they ought to be viewed in the light of God's law, and predicted success or loss, happiness or misery, accordingly. We must ever remember that this is the true office of the Prophet. The word *prophet* means, a *speaker forth*, or a *forthteller*, of God's will. That the 'forthteller' became a 'foreteller,' was because he had got his heart so thoroughly imbued with the spirit of God's laws, that he was able to perceive and know that grandest of all truths, that those laws are ever unchangeable; and that, therefore, when we say, 'History repeats itself,' it is only because like causes must always produce like consequences.

Now, when we clearly see the possibility of this standpoint, it may fairly be questioned whether the preacher of the present day does not too much surrender a part of his birthright;—whether it might not be well for the clergy to return to the old ways; not shrink-

ing from the discussion of passing events of political interest; but, rather, attempting to comment thereupon, as being the exponents of God's universal laws, the setters forth of His 'judgments.'

Believing, as I do, that such a course is fairly within the province of the Preacher, I propose to ask you to consider the present great War,[1] of which our hearts are now so full, in the light of a judgment of God. I cannot do this fully in one sermon. Indeed, for reasons which will presently appear, I shall ask you to try and follow me through several sermons, which will gradually lead us up to the truth which I desire to set forth. And, as it is most necessary that we should be quite clear as to the terms which we are to use, I shall, on the present occasion, do no more than try to show you, in the light of our text, what God desires us to understand, when we speak of anything as being His 'judgment.'

It is a very serious thing to attach a wrong meaning to a word. It is serious, because if we do so, we shall be sure gradually to grow into attaching a similarly wrong meaning to the *thing* which the word represents. And this is just what we have done with regard to this word 'judgment,' when we connect it with God. And, consequently, we have also grown to form quite wrong notions about the true character, and the real will, of God as the Judge of the earth.

What is the duty of a Judge? Clearly, it is to set forth, or declare, the law of the land. The judge, with

[1] Preached in July 1887 at the time of the Russo-Turkish war.

us, instructs the jury as to points of law, and clearly sets before them matters of fact. The jury then become *judges* on the point of fact. They deliver their *judgment* as to whether the accused is guilty or innocent. They bring in either a *judgment* of condemnation, or a *judgment* of acquittal: that is to say, they express their deliberate opinion on the question before them. Then the judge delivers his 'judgment.' He either sets the prisoner free, or pronounces a sentence. In neither case does he express his own opinion. He simply sets forth the law of the land. In one case he says: 'The jury judge you innocent, the law judges you free to go.' In the other case he says: 'The jury judge you guilty; the law judges that such and such a punishment be awarded.' But neither judge nor jury *inflict* any punishment. That is the duty of a totally distinct set of officers.

You observe, then,—

First.—That judgment does not necessarily mean condemnation. The man who is acquitted receives judgment just as much as the man who is condemned.

Secondly.—That when judgment does result in condemnation the Judge has nothing to do with the infliction of punishment, or pain, on the condemned.

Thirdly.—We hence gather that the true meaning of *judgment* is, a declaration, or making clear, of facts, and of the law of the country as bearing upon those facts.

Even so, believe me, God's 'judgments' are, in Bible language, simply the declaration of His laws.

No more; and no less. It is an entire misuse of language, and an utter perversion of terms, to employ the word *judgment* as though it meant the same thing as *punishment*. And it is an utter misunderstanding of God's character, to connect only the ideas of sorrow, destruction, and misery with the working of His judgments. It is nothing short of blasphemy against the One Father of all to call disease, death, and loss, His 'judgments;' while we refuse to recognise health, recovery from sickness, and success, as being equally His 'judgments' also. For, in good truth, *all* these things are alike His 'judgments,' that is to say, the *expression of His opinion* upon the breaking, or the keeping, of some one or other of His laws.

So far I have tried to show you what is the true sense in which we may speak of any events, whether in our own history, or in the history of the world, as being 'judgments' of God. Let us now notice some points which characterise these His judgments.

And, first, these declarations of God's opinion do not take place in consequence of any personal or arbitrary interference on His part in our concerns. They are brought about simply by the natural reactions of the laws themselves. The fact that we keep a given law brings a certain amount of health or happiness along with it. The fact that we break a law, of any kind, brings a corresponding amount of sickness or misery along with it. With man's laws it is otherwise. A man steals, and we imprison him. A child at

school is idle and mischievous, and we flog him. Here is, (1) personal interference on the part of the administrator of the law; and (2) the infliction of a punishment which has no connection with the fault. In God's great plan, the broken law itself acts the part of the administrator; and its punishment simply consists in the natural, and inevitable, consequences of the fault.

Hence, secondly, we can understand how it is that such terrible consequences often follow mere mistakes and errors. People say sometimes that it is unjust that a lifetime of suffering or disappointment should follow from the well-intentioned mistake of a moment. They even accuse God of unkindness, and unfairness, for permitting such results. But it is not so. The one act of folly or of error has broken a law; and the consequences of that broken law *must* follow. It is not that God has arbitrarily interfered to inflict pain or loss; but that the ignorant or wilful child *must* take the consequences of its own ignorance, or wilfulness, and may even have to see those consequences involve others also.

For—and here is the third and most important thing for us to remember—even as God does not personally interfere with the execution of His judgments, so neither does He personally interfere to arrest them. God cannot break, or even suspend, the action of His own laws. Yes; I do not shrink from the word, *cannot*. It was said of Our Lord that, 'He *could* do there no mighty work, because of their unbelief.' Why is this?

Because God made all of His laws, in the first place, in absolute love, and absolute wisdom. If ever a single case occurred to call for the alteration of these laws, would it not prove that they were originally imperfect, because they failed to meet this particular case? And, if God could make or devise any imperfect law, He would cease to be God! No. When He tells us, 'I am Jehovah. I change not,'—He really tells us, 'I am perfect wisdom. I am perfect love. That love and that wisdom are shown in my unchangeable judgments. Dream not, like the heathen, that I can be persuaded into altering those judgments. Rather, seek, and pray, that ye may be able to understand them, and so learn "righteousness."'

Yes; pray! Here is the true theory of all prayer. To pray for a blessing of any kind, is to put ourselves in communion with the wisdom and love of a Father, who will give us the answer, not by personal interference, but by communicating to us a reaction of increased wisdom, leading us to discover the way of obedience to that law, the keeping of which will bring along with it the desired blessing. To pray for the removal of any trouble is, in like manner, a seeking from Him the inspiration of that wisdom which will open our eyes, and enable us to discover how, and when, and where, we in our ignorance have been breaking some law, the consequences of which have been inflicting upon us the sorrow, sickness, or disappointment. In this sense we can understand the apparent paradox,

that God's laws are unchangeable, and that man can nevertheless learn to escape their action; not because God has altered His law, but because man has been taught to alter his attitude towards the law. And sure I am that the more often and the more earnestly anyone tries thus to put himself in communion with the source of wisdom, the more easily, and the more quickly, will he learn the one great lesson of obedience to God's judgments, and of submission to His declarations of His own immutable laws.

For, as our text tells us plainly, when God's judgments are in the earth, the people may learn righteousness. That is to say,—when we study the expression of God's opinion of right and wrong, as set forth by the events of our own home lives, or in the history of the great world, we need never fail to learn the lesson He wants to be learned, if we will only trace back the pain and the misery to its first cause, and so learn to obey the law, the breaking of which entailed God's judgment upon us.

The truth is, when we speak of God as 'Our Father,' we are too ready to forget that a father has duties towards his children, and that the highest of all those duties is their moral and spiritual education. And, as long as ignorance and laziness find place in any child's heart, so long must its education consist of a constant succession of more or less painful judgments, or expressions of opinion, on the part of the educator. The wise teacher will not spare the infliction of pain, until the

child has learned its lesson. As it is with the child at school, so also is it with ourselves, as God's children, in our own individual lives :—so is it with the great heart of collective humanity, which we term the world. God's grand plan is, to educate the world, as a whole, for Himself. Towards this 'plan of the ages' everything around us is gradually tending: slowly, as it seems to us. If the world-children were all of them docile, loving, willing to learn, God's judgments would all be expressed in manifestations of joyful and triumphant progress; each new law discovered, and obeyed, helping mankind ever onward and upward with unmistakable steps. But, as it is, the world frets, and rebels, and is lazy and quarrelsome; and so it has to encounter expressions of God's opinion which seem at times very terrible, but which, after all, are absolutely necessary for the ultimate education of the child; by compelling it to see, and to feel, that health, peace, and happiness are only to be obtained by submitting to learn its lesson, by studying its Master's work, and so learning righteousness! An earthly father's love is never so truly shown as when he spares not his own feelings, but consistently causes his child to suffer pain whenever it does wrong. The child does not recognise a loving will, *at the time*; but thinks its father hard; and yet in after-years it grows to love and bless the inflexible justice which never overlooked a wilful fault. So is it with us and Our Father, now. We may fail, at the time of suffering, to recognise the wisdom and love which has

adjusted the law which has inflicted the suffering; but, even here and now, when a few years have passed, we can look back and acknowledge that the good which has come out of the evil is infinitely greater than the evil ever seemed to be.

And oh, when we think thus of our Father's education-plan, what depths and vistas of infinite wisdom and love may we begin to see, even in the sorest of His 'judgments.' Yes; when we can thus have faith in Him that is 'above all, and through all, and in you all;' —when we can 'see God' no longer as an arbitrary and interfering dispenser of rewards and punishments simply at the pleasure of His own almighty will;—when we can drop the blinding scales of semi-heathen tradition, and recognise in God a Father, who sees that His children are too ignorant and lazy to learn, except under compulsion, and who loves them far too dearly to leave them in their ignorance and laziness,—then shall we be able to enter fully into the promise of our text; and, by studying our Father's judgments, shall we grow into our Father's righteousness.

VI.

GOD'S JUDGMENTS.

II.

The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether. Moreover by them is Thy servant warned, and in keeping of them there is great reward.'—PSALM xix. 9–11.

YOU will remember that it is my object, in this series of sermons, to try and point out the meaning of, and the reason for, those great national calamities (especially that of war)—which are generally spoken of as being the 'judgments' of God upon the sins of men. In order to prepare our minds for a clear understanding of the great lessons which I shall try to point out, I endeavoured to show you, in my last sermon, the true meaning of the word *judgment.* In itself, this word signifies nothing more than an authoritative declaration of the law in respect to a disputed point. Judgment, therefore, does not necessarily mean condemnation, much less punishment. We saw that in human law the judge inflicts no punishment; he exerts no personal interference whatever on the condemned criminal. We saw, again, that in human law the punishment has no necessary connection with the offence; so that, if you find a man suffering a given punishment, you cannot at

once say exactly what offence the criminal has been guilty of. So, too, as we see by our text, God's 'judgments' are not necessarily declarations of guilt; much less are they necessarily punishments. They are simply declarations that such and such a law has been either kept or broken. Neither, even when they are declarations of a broken law, does God personally interfere to inflict the punishment which has been deserved. That punishment is inflicted simply by what we may call the necessary and inevitable recoil, or reaction, of the broken law itself. Any broken law brings along with it a measure of pain which lasts till we learn to keep the law. Any law kept brings along with it a measure of happiness which lasts until we break the law. Hence we further saw that God has not left the world in the dark as to what His laws really are. When we suffer under the consequences of one of His 'judgments,' we have no need to say, 'God is afflicting us for our sins,' and wonder what we can have done to deserve His wrath; for there is always an absolutely certain connection and relationship between God's 'judgments' and the punishments which they entail, or the happiness which they confer. Therefore we can always, if we will, trace back our suffering to its source; and there, at that source, shall we find the exact sin, or error, of which, *and of none other*, God is expressing His opinion in any given way. And, clearly understanding this, we can rise out of the old heathen notion of God as an avenging executioner, up to the true Christian notion

of Him as an educating Father. We can see how that God is the punisher of sin, not because He interferes to punish, but because He has ordered that every sin shall contain within itself the germs of its own punishment. Thus we can see how it is His will that every sin shall, in the case of every docile and willing child, actually tend to work out its own cure. And so, finally, we can gradually grow to see how the sorest sufferings, and the most terrible punishments, arising out of the recoil of broken laws of God's order, are really the truest blessings to mankind; because they tend to raise us out of ignorance, apathy, and laziness (which are *in themselves* curses ten thousand times worse than all the sufferings which they produce), and so drive us to seek to understand and keep the laws which we were breaking in our ignorance and laziness;—thus teaching us the exact lesson which is conveyed in those wonderfully deep words of our text:—'by Thy judgments is Thy servant warned; and in keeping of them there is great reward.'

Now therefore that we have laid down these general principles, from which to start, and to which we can at any time refer, I shall ask you to go on to consider the action of God's judgments, as seen in the working of His broken laws. And I do not know that we can do better than select for our study those four great national calamities which are spoken of by the Prophet as God's 'four sore judgments' (Ezek. xiv. 21), namely—evil beasts, famine, pestilence, and war.

First, then, we take the case of the prevalence of evil

beasts. On what sin or error is this God's 'judgment'? The answer is at once to be found by asking, what state of society allows destructive beasts to increase and multiply? There was a time when there were evil beasts in Europe. Two thousand years ago there were lions still in Europe. Eight hundred years ago there were still bears in Scotland. It is but little more than one hundred and fifty years since the last wolf was killed in Ireland. But a plague of evil beasts would be simply impossible in England, now. Why? Is it because our national sins are less crying than they were? Not so. But it is because the prevalence of wild beasts is God's way of expressing His opinion upon man's failure to comply with the great law, 'Be fruitful and replenish the earth.' A thinly inhabited country, and rude and clumsy weapons, allow of the existence of wild beasts. Savage warfare between tribe and tribe, family and family, allows of the increase of wild beasts. But let a country be properly colonised by peaceful settlers in possession of useful arts, and the wild beasts are quickly swept away. That is to say, whatever the sins of such a people may be, they are no longer of such a kind as render them liable to a visitation of noisome beasts; and, therefore, this form of God's judgments is no longer possible in their case.

We next consider God's judgment of famine, with which we must feel that we have a far more close and practical concern than we can have with the judgment we have just been considering.

Once more, then, we ask, on what national sin, or sins, is famine a judgment? Does God ever send famines as an expression of His opinion as to the general sinfulness of a people? Once more, we must go back to our general principles. What are the causes of famine? Why are famines of so much less frequent occurrence in Europe, now, than they used to be? We have years of high prices, and dear bread; but we have had nothing, in our days, to call a real famine, either in England, or in Europe generally. Why is this? Is it because we are less sinful, as a nation, than we were, and so God spares us this most terrible judgment?

Not so. It is because we are learning to obey, and so to conquer, those laws, the disobedience to which renders famines possible. Famines arise chiefly from ignorance of the true laws of agriculture. Proper drainage, proper rotation of crops, and proper study of the possibilities of artificial manures, go far to do away with the effects of bad seasons, and, consequently, our land yields a far more steadily average burden than it used to do. A continuance of unfavourable weather, which fifty years ago would have caused almost a dearth, now only slightly raises the price of corn. True, we have still something, perhaps much, to learn, as to new methods of providing for, or counteracting, the effects of bad seasons, or failing fertility; but we are setting ourselves to learn, and experiment, and discover, and we cannot doubt but that, in another generation or so, we shall have so far mastered the true laws of agri-

culture that, whatever may be our national sins, the judgment of famine will simply become an impossibility, so far as the productiveness of our land is concerned.

But there is another possible cause of famine, and that is, the insufficiency of national production. Here in England we only produce food enough to last us for eight months in a year. Now, this is a fact which may some day cause us much sorrow. Should England ever be at war, and lose the command of the seas, and so be unable to purchase and import those four months' provisions of each year which we do not raise for ourselves, then, indeed, prices might rise to a height which would cause great suffering and want. Should such a time ever come, let us not say that God is punishing us for our general sinfulness by dearth and scarcity. Rather let us say that, in the present state of the world, when wars are possible, any nation that deliberately chooses only to raise two-thirds of the food which it needs, must take the chance of possible dearth, some day or other; and that, if the dearth does come, it will be neither more or less than God's judgment upon the national choice to remain dependent upon others for a large portion of our needful supply of food.

We recollect well the Irish famine. On what was this a judgment? Some good people, judging of God as the heathen do, said that God was punishing us for the laws we had made, granting certain privileges to Roman Catholics! Not so. It was God's expression of opinion as to the utter laziness and apathy of the

inhabitants, who would not exert themselves to try and till their land to the best of their power, and fight manfully against the difficulties of their soil and their climate, but contented themselves with just planting the easiest crop in the world, and feeding upon a food which could neither give them strength for their muscles, or for their brains. And so the potato at last sickened, from always being planted year after year, the same seed in the same ground; and, after one or two years of unheeded warnings, a most awful calamity fell on the country. But, in the long run, that awful calamity will be recognised as the greatest blessing that ever yet befell the nation; because it compelled the introduction of a new era, and caused a flow of enterprise and capital to set in to a land which had long been lying desert under the influences of native apathy and consequent poverty.

Take, once more, the present[1] terrible famine in India. On what is this a judgment? I answer unhesitatingly:—Partly on the apathy of the natives. Partly on the ignorance and indifference of our own Government. India is perfectly well known to be a country where the harvest is entirely dependent, through vast districts, upon the periodical rains. It is perfectly well known that in some years those rains are great; in others very small. It is perfectly well known that about once in ten years, or thereabouts, the rains are so small that the crops cannot grow. What is the plain

[1] Preached in 1877 at the time of the great Indian famine.

lesson to be learned from these facts? That we should store up the surplus water of wet years, and provide reservoirs and canals to conduct it to the thirsty fields in years of drought. This was done in old times. Centuries ago the old Kings of India built huge reservoirs and lakes (one, thirty miles long), in which the fertilising waters were stored. There were no such terrible famines, then. But war and discord swept through the country; the old dykes and mounds fell into ruin; the waters were no longer saved and utilised, and periodical famines once more returned to ravage the country. But let a wise and enlightened Government restore these old works (reverting to the civilisation of a by-gone age), and God's judgment of famine will cease to press sorely upon India, even though her national sins remain as great as ever. And, if this be the case, then even these awful visitations, and even this appalling loss of precious life, will be well worth the price that will be paid for them, in the increase of civilisation, the encouragement of industry, the relief of the inhabitants from the cruel yoke of the money-lender, and the preservation of infinitely more millions of lives than are now being sacrificed, in generations yet to come.

Here I must close, for the present. In my next sermon I will bring before you some thoughts as to God's judgment of Pestilence; and, finally, I will ask you to consider the most terrible judgment of War.

Yet one word more. Some will say this is a strange

kind of sermon. Some may observe that they don't see much good in it, as there is not one word of 'Gospel' in it, from beginning to end.

No. I freely acknowledge that there is no word of 'Gospel,' in the popular, or (shall I say), in the *cant* acceptation of that term. But if 'Gospel' means, as it does, 'the good message,' or 'the message of God,' then I venture to say that every sentence I have written does contain a true gospel—does convey some portion of a good message concerning God. For I am trying to tell you the best of all messages, about the all-embracing love and wisdom of the One Father of All. I tell you of a God who so loves us that He is determined to raise us up from the level of mere animals, to be higher than the angels, and to stand next in the order of created things to His own Self. I tell you of a God who knows that struggles, and conflicts, and tears, and sufferings, and pain ennoble the soul, and raise it far above the stage of passive sinlessness. I tell you of a God who knows that His children will remain content with the lower stage, unless He stirs them up to seek the higher one. I tell you of a God who has made the breaking of all His Laws of wisdom and love to inflict pain, simply in order to drive us to try and find out ways of keeping those laws; that so, at last, we may more and more conform to His ideal of love and wisdom, and, 'being made perfect through sufferings,' shall be able to 'see Him as He is,' because we have been made 'like Him.'

VII.

GOD'S JUDGMENTS.

III.

'Righteous art Thou, O Lord, when I plead with Thee;—yet let me talk with Thee of Thy judgments.'—JER. xii. 1.

IF I have at all succeeded in carrying my hearers along with me, in the train of thoughts which I have endeavoured to work out in the last two sermons, they will, I trust, be ready to acquiesce in the following brief summary of our argument, namely:—

First, that what we call God's 'judgments' are not acts of direct personal interference on His part, but that they are simply the consequences of our own actions:—or, to word it, as I believe, more truly and more fully, they are the expressions of His opinion, conveyed to us by the operation of His own Eternal Laws of right and wrong: those Laws, when obeyed, working so as to produce our happiness; and, when disobeyed, working so as to inflict suffering upon us.

And, secondly, inasmuch as these consequences of happiness or suffering are invariably bound by a close chain of cause and effect to the law which produces them, it is, therefore, always possible for us, by careful thought, to discover the exact sin or error which has broken any

law, and so entailed upon us any suffering. And, whatever other sins or errors we may happen to be committing at the same time, we have no right to say that the 'judgment' is a punishment upon *these*; unless, indeed, (as may sometimes happen,) any of them have been *indirectly* concerned in helping to produce the state of mind which led us to break the particular law, and so has entailed upon us the particular suffering.

Adhering to these two general principles, and following the same course as that which we pursued last month, we have now to consider God's 'sore judgment' of pestilence and disease.

We ask, then, is there any national sin, or error, which necessarily tends to produce disease? Or does God simply send disease, at His will, to chastise a sinful nation for some national sin, which has no necessary connection with the pestilence itself? Need I say how important it is for us to obtain a clear answer to this question? The 'sore judgments' of noisome beasts, and of famine, seem to have but little concern with ourselves, at the present day; but outbreaks of epidemic disease, whereby thousands of precious lives are sacrificed, are occurring every few years. On what sins of ours are fever, smallpox, cholera, God's 'judgments'?

Once more the answer comes to us clearly defined and unmistakable. Disease, premature death, arise from, and, therefore, are God's 'judgments' upon, our national or local ignorance and neglect of God's Laws of Health.

Few conclusions are more irresistible, and few researches of modern times are more surely based, or of more solemn practical interest, than are those of Sanitary Science—that is to say, the inquiry into God's Laws of Health. We know, now, as an absolute fact, admitting of no doubt or question, that certain diseases require certain conditions for their existence. Provide those conditions and the disease *will* show itself, and carry on its ravages. Take away those conditions, and the disease simply ceases to exist. And those conditions are, in every case, want of purity and cleanliness, in some shape or other. Once the terrible plague found a regular domicile in our country. It is gone, now. Once a fearful disease, called the 'black death' carried off whole villages at a time; now we do not even know exactly what that disease was. Once leprosy was common in England; now it is practically unknown. Once smallpox carried off its hundreds of thousands; now we have reduced its mortality to practically nothing, for anybody who chooses to be protected against it. Many of us can remember the terribly common ravages of the old typhus fever, which carried off whole households at a time. Even this is disappearing. Ay, and even the fearful and mysterious cholera has had its exciting cause tracked out, so that we have every hope that, even should it ever return, it will never be so awfully fatal again. Now, why has God thus withdrawn, or mitigated, His 'judgments' of pestilence on our land? Is it because our national sins are fewer

than they were? Nay, not so. It is simply because we have been discovering the true nature of His laws of health; because we have learned that foul drains, foul air, foul water, foul bodies, are the breeding dens of disease; because we are trying to reduce the number of these foul things; and, in proportion as we succeed in doing this, so are the conditions of pestilence removed and so God's laws cease to express to us His 'judgments' in this particular way.

Nothing seems to be more certain than that at least one half of our present deaths from all diseases are preventable, by attention to the simple laws of bodily health alone. At present, take the whole country through, about twenty-five persons out of every thousand must die every year. It is no theory, but a fact demonstrated by experiment, that this number is fully twice as great as it ought to be; ay, and nearly twice as great *as it actually is* in some towns and villages where the laws of health are even moderately well attended to. Try and realise what this means, and then you will see how sorely God's judgment of disease even now presses on our country. Six hundred thousand persons die every year in England. Three hundred thousand of these might be spared, if we were only fully obeying God's laws of health. Look at our own immediate neighbourhood. From seventy to eighty lives come to an end every year, in our 'Three Parishes.' Probably forty of these might be saved, if we were living truly healthy lives. Forty lives prolonged to love and work for many

years! Forty families preserved from sorrow and mourning every year! Two hundred sad hearts of survivors the less every year among us! And all this loss of life, and infliction of misery, brought down upon our own heads, solely by our own apathy, laziness, and unwillingness to obey God's Laws of Health.

And, when we turn to the moral side of disease; when we consider how constitutions are weakened by luxury and indulgence; how disease is produced, fostered, and handed down from generation to generation, by the working of those social vices which we love to dignify with pleasant names; when we remember how the national curse of intemperance causes the loss of thousands of lives yearly, and how the national habits of even moderate drinking are sapping the nerve-power and enfeebling the brains, and souring the dispositions, of tens of thousands more—we cannot but believe that in this way also God's judgment is pressing very sorely upon our country now; we cannot but believe that obedience to God's *moral* laws of health would still further add largely to the roll of those precious lives which, as we have seen, might be saved to us by a reasonable obedience to His *physical* laws of health.

Oh, believe me, God's Judgments *are* upon us, even now, as a nation, for *these* our sins. Nor will He withdraw them:—nay, nor *can* He withdraw them, until we have learned to submit to those laws. And it is of His dear love that He will not withdraw them. He longs to see us a godly, cleanly, chaste, sober people;

and, so long as we are content with our present state, so long will He continue to express to us His opinion of that state, in the keeping up a death rate far higher than it need be, as well as in the occasional outburst of some terrible epidemic.

But, once more. The length of our lives is much shorter than it ought to be. In this way also God's judgments are upon us. When Moses of old declared that the full span of man's life was 'three score years and ten,' and that its outside limit was 'four score' years, he does not, as some fancy, tell us what must always be the case, but merely tells us what was the fact in his own day. As the assertion of a fact, it is simply untrue of the length of life of Englishmen at the present day. Our lives are at least ten years longer than they were in Moses' time. Instead of the 'three score and ten' being an outside limit, it is an age attained to by one person in every four that is born; by one in three of every child that lives to be three years old; by one in two of every person that lives to be forty-five! Instead of 'four score' being an age to which hardly anyone can hope to attain, it is an age that nearly one person in every ten attains to, and which one person in every five that is forty-five years old, may fairly hope to reach, and to be fairly vigorous thereat. The truth is, that the average duration of human life is already lengthening. And there is no reason why it should not be further immensely increased. All the larger animals seem to live about eight times

the number of years they take in coming to full growth; and their longest lived individuals live half as long again as this. Judged by this standard, the average life of man should not be less than 150 years, and occasional cases ought to be known of a duration of 200, or even 250 years. I do not say that men ever *will* live as long as this, continuing healthy and robust and workful, both in body and mind, almost up to the very last; but sure I am that it is no visionary dream, but a sober fact, that the present life of man, with all his grand powers of gaining knowledge, loving, and working, might be immensely extended, as years roll on, by our taking more heed to God's judgments of disease and premature death, and setting ourselves patiently and lovingly to study to the very bottom His wisely designed laws of health.

And this thought leads us, finally, to another, and a very important one. How can we best fit ourselves for that patient, humble, calm investigation of God's laws, of which I have just spoken?

Let me answer this question by referring you back to a paragraph in my first sermon on this subject, in which I used these words (page 178), 'Yes: pray! Here is the true theory of all prayer.'

It may have seemed to some, by whom the views which I have put forward are not yet familiarly recognised as Bible truths, that in taking away the thought of God's personal interference in the operation of His laws on our lives, I have also taken away the thought

of the need for, or the efficacy of, prayer. Most distinctly do I reply, Not so. The beauty of our standpoint is, that it elevates the whole question of prayer to a dignity which can alike commend itself to the true Christian and to the true man of science.

We pray to God to remove one of his judgments. And I fully believe that He answers us. But how? Is it by personally altering the operation of one of His laws, and so compelling the judgment to depart from us? Not so. He answers us in a way far better for ourselves than that would be. By the very fact of our looking up to Him, by the very act of thus recognising a source of wisdom outside of, and beyond, our ignorance, and a source of power above and apart from our own weakness, we have placed our spirits in communication with His Spirit; we have established (so to speak) a close and direct circuit of intelligence between ourselves and Him, between our ignorance and His infinite knowledge; and so He answers our cry, not by personally suspending His law, but by imparting to us some portion of His wisdom, whereby we are enabled to perceive wherein we have been breaking His law, and how we can keep it better in the future.

Let no one say, then, to hold such views as I have expressed as to the invariability of God's laws, tends to weaken our faith in the efficacy of prayer. Rather let us say that these views place the belief in answer to prayer upon a higher, firmer, truer basis than before. The cry to God to interfere, and stop the action of His

own laws of love and wisdom, is the selfish and irrational cry of the poor heathen. The earnest effort to place our own spirit in communion with the Father of Lights, acknowledging that there is a source of knowledge and wisdom outside of ourselves, and earnestly longing to be filled from that source, this is the truly reasoning service which God asks of us; this is the effort which by its very existence brings about its own fulfilment; this is the prayer which no longer rings to heaven as a bitter protest against the crushing wheels of some inevitable destiny, but which breathes the true spirit of a child: 'Father, Thy will is health and salvation. Give me wisdom to know that will. Give me strength that it may evermore be done; in me, by me, through me.'

VIII.

GOD'S JUDGMENTS.

IV.

'The Lord is King, be the people never so impatient: He sitteth between the cherubim, be the earth never so unquiet.'—PSALM xcix. 1 (Prayer Book Version).

WE have now at length arrived at the consideration of the question which I proposed at the outset, namely,—In what sense can we say that war in general, and the present terrible war in particular, can be understood as 'God's judgment' upon the earth? And I would venture to entreat that in justice to my subject, if not to myself, no one of the four portions into which I have been compelled to divide my observations may be looked upon as a sermon whole and complete in itself. Each one must be taken in connection with all the other three; and then anything which may appear to be omitted in any one, taken separately, will, I hope, be found to be sufficiently supplied in some one of the others.

I approach the consideration of this concluding portion of our subject with a very deep sense of its importance, and of the responsibility which rests upon me in venturing to handle such a theme. For every student

of the history of the world cannot help being struck with the fact that what we call 'God's sore judgment' of war stands out as a ghastly reality in every page of that history. And how ghastly that reality is, we, here in happy England, can form no conception whatever. The horrors of the grim cannonade, or the savage attempt to storm a fortified position, are fearful enough. But when we further contemplate the murder and torture of the wounded; the burning of villages; the desolation of families; the woes of outraged women; the festering masses of wounded, waiting for the scanty attention that hospital surgeons and nurses can afford;—when one calls up the picture of all this, the cry is ready to go up from our hearts:—God's judgment? Can there be a God who permits all this? If there be a God who sends war on the earth, can He be one who knows and cares for the agony of the creatures whom He has made? Can He be anything more than a cold, passionless abstraction of creative power? If, as we are so often told, 'God is Love,' how is it possible that He can allow,—nay, even inflict,—all these untold horrors?

Such questions are being asked by warmhearted and earnest thinkers everywhere around us. And for want of receiving an honest and thoughtful answer, the faith of many is shaken; the hearts of many more are sorely perplexed. By God's help I will try to give you the answer which seems to me to satisfy both my heart and my intelligence. At all events, it shall be a straightforward one; neither evading the difficulties of the

question, nor asking you to be satisfied with the mere assertion that 'it is, and therefore is right.'

Following out the line of argument, and taking our stand upon the basis, which has been worked out and established in the preceding sermons, we can say at once that in calling War a 'Judgment' of God, we declare it to be the expression of God's opinion as to some national sin. And that national sin will in every case be the one the existence of, or indulgence in, which was the first active cause in bringing about the particular war.

Or shall I word this general rule thus?—God from the very first has so designed and ordered the laws which influence our moral nature, that any long-continued departure from those laws of order shall be sure to produce in the erring people such a national state of disorder as either prompts them to attack others or lays them open to the aggression of others. In a word, as neglect or defiance of the laws of health produces disease, so neglect or defiance of God's laws of national order will infallibly, sooner or later, plunge a nation into war.

If we will carefully study the history of the world, we shall find, I do not hesitate to assert, that this has been the story of the origin of every great war. First comes misgovernment at home, or domestic disorder of some kind. Then, out of this, grows a reaction which either disposes us to attack others, or drives others to attack us.

It would require far more than the short time at my command to endeavour to prove this assertion by a series of illustrations which should analyse the earliest beginnings of the great wars of history, but I believe that my assertion will stand the most searching examination. It will be found, too, that it is not always any great crying national sin which entails God's judgment of war upon us. A slight error, or excusable ignorance, may expose us to the contagion of a fatal disease. Even so, a mere error in judgment or policy, or a growing national habit of no great moral delinquency, may involve a nation in war. This was the case with England in the Crimean war; and, so far as we can judge at present, was nearly being the case with our country again, a year ago. Now, when a war is thus brought upon a nation, by nothing more than a well-meant, but mistaken, policy on the part of its rulers, then, however great and crying may be its national sins, we have no right to say that it is a judgment upon *these*, except in so far as they may have helped to make the mistaken policy possible. To explain what I mean by a simple example. I have a boy in my school who is habitually idle; and yet is clever enough to escape punishment, by bringing up his lesson just sufficiently well learned to pass muster. One day that boy tells me a falsehood, and I punish him for it. In inflicting that punishment I express my opinion as to the boy's falsehood; but I do not punish him for his idleness and troublesomeness in general. And if he went home and

said that I had so punished him, or that he could not tell what I had punished him for, he would be both lazy and untruthful. So with us, as nations. When the judgment of war comes upon us, we must not take refuge under whining commonplaces about its being sent to punish us for our sins (each one considering that a different national sin has influenced God to send it); but we must honestly and manfully inquire what is the particular law of God's good order, the breaking or forgetting of which has been the immediate cause which rendered the war possible.

And, to get one step deeper into the very heart of the subject, I believe we shall always find that the domestic sin has consisted in a national forgetfulness of the grand truth of our text:—the truth that 'the Lord is King.' We need to realise that this earth is God's earth. We need to realise that His kingdom is already established therein. We need to realise that there really are such things as God's Laws of National life and health, and that man *cannot* successfully set up his own instead of them. 'Policy,' 'expediency,' 'statecraft'—all these are things which, as a rule, deliberately and avowedly ignore the existence of God, deride the very idea of absolute Truth, Right, and Justice, and base their whole scheme upon what the party in possession of a temporary majority may happen to consider most likely to suit best with what they imagine at the moment to be the 'national interest'! For a time these rules of policy and expediency may seem to

succeed, but of an absolute certainty the accumulated pressure of God's resisted Law sooner or later proves too strong for them, and the outburst of the pent-up flood brings sorrow and loss along with it, as the expression of God's opinion upon our attempts to substitute human 'politics' for the Divine Law.

Look at the present terrible struggle from this point of view. For long years the government of Turkey has been one concentrated essence of fraud, tyranny, and every imaginable crime against God's Laws of Right and Truth. The Religion of Turkey, starting from its fundamental maxim that God hates, and requires the extermination of all men who are not of the Mahometan religion, is the most monstrous denial of the existence of a God of Love that can possibly be conceived. Both in Church and State, then, the Turkish Government has heaped up an accumulation of resistance to the Laws of the King of the Earth, such as could no longer exist. The reaction has come, and however we pity the nation, and however much we may sympathise with a noble and manly defence, we must all agree that, as a government and a religion, Turkey has brought all her woe upon herself, and suffers most righteously.

But was Russia, therefore, justified in attacking her? Not so. We have no right to answer that question in the affirmative. Russia's hands are not so pure, her motives not so ingenuous, as to be above suspicion. No. Long-nursed schemes and hopes of national am-

bition and aggrandisement—long-cherished disregard of God's eternal laws of right and wrong at home, have wrought their reaction in this case also; and, whatever may be the issue of the war, the terrible loss of the flower of her men, and the enormous expenditure of treasure, will sufficiently convey to Russia for many a long year to come, God's expression of His opinion of the professed disinterestedness with which she entered into the present conflict.

Yes—when viewed from the standpoint of God's Eternal Kingdom, we can see that the War was, in good truth, a necessity of the time—a cruel, grisly necessity, I grant, but yet a merciful one.

I repeat it—*a merciful one.* The King of the Earth is One Who has ordered all His Laws in such a manner as to cause even the wrath of man to praise Him. Horrible as war seems to us to be, it is, in good truth an Angel of mercy. The pestilence is needed to stir us from our apathy, and drive us to study and conquer the laws of health. Even so is war a necessity, to rouse us from national apathy and self-complacency, and drive us to study and master the true laws of rightful government at home. Thus all the evils and horrors of the direst war are not worthy to be compared with the benefits and blessings which the lessons it can teach are capable of bequeathing to the countless generations of posterity. For one life lost—for one home ravaged—in a war, millions of lives and homes shall be made happier in the coming future.

Let no reader say that this is a mere parson's dream. I have to thank one of the ablest of England's novelists, the late Lord Lytton, for the words which long years ago first suggested to me this solution of the most awful and tremendous riddle of human history. In one of his exquisite and utterly unrivalled domestic fictions, he brings forward this idea, and works it out by careful exposition of the after-results of all great historical wars clearly showing that, taken as a whole, all wars have conferred permanent blessings on the world, as the result of their transient curse.

Still some one will say, 'But, granting all this, why did God make the world so? Could He not have ordered His laws so as to bring about the same ultimate result without all this mass of intermediate suffering?'

This question is a fair one; and we must not shrink from or ignore it.

I reply, then, as follows. We fail to do justice to God, or God's plans, because we are by nature so utterly selfish. We cannot raise our eyes above and beyond the short-lived pain of individuals. All our feelings circle round, and cling to, the narrow sphere of personal joy, personal pain, personal life. We find it so hard to realise that we are but units in one vast whole, and that the age in which we live is but a moment in a vast and boundless eternity. Now God has to deal with, and to provide for, the interest of the whole world, in respect to place and in respect to time as well. He sees that the interest of mankind, as a whole, will be best pro-

moted by helping man gradually to attain to the highest perfection of Education of which his nature is capable. By this means the human race will become higher, nobler, grander, more Godlike, than they could have done had they been created perfect, instead of being helped to work out their own perfection. If, in carrying out this one grand plan of the ages, some individuals appear to suffer more than others, so far as mortal eyes can see, depend upon it that the Father of all has devised, in His wisdom, plenty of ways, not yet fully understood by us, by which the individual education will also be best promoted by the suffering. For, as I have said before, education by pain is the best possible way to make us, either as a race or as individuals, rise above the dead level of selfish passive enjoyment, and learn that pleasure and happiness have no real connection whatever with each other.

'Perfect through suffering.' Yes. As with the Master, so with the Servant, as with our Elder Brother, so must it be with His world-wide brethren! For myself; for those I love; for my congregation; for my country; for the world, I honestly confess that I desire no other, no better, no higher destiny.

In this faith, in the faith that absolute love and absolute wisdom are thus guiding and overruling everything, in the faith that 'God is the king, be the people never so unquiet,' in the faith that God's law is working everywhere, though the wheels of cruelty, and rapine, and pestilence seem to pinch and crush and grind the

most sorely, I can still look on through the Present to the Future. It is that terrible element of Time that shuts us out from God. To God there is no time. His eye sees beginning and end all at once; He sees the pain, and the outcome of the pain, at the same moment. He sees the curse; but He sees also the baby blessing cradled in the curse's arms. And the more like God we ourselves grow; the more shall we be able to see these things even as He sees them.

In this faith, then, I can look on, and believe, with our own glorious poet, that 'somehow good shall be the final goal of ill;' that every struggle manfully won through, shall make the heart of each individual, and the great heart of the great world, purer, wiser, more loving; that every agony shall raise us, and raise mankind, a step higher in the scale of true life, men 'rising on stepping stones of their dead selves to higher things':—that not a heart-pang, nor a national catastrophe, can occur, 'or but subserves another's gain.' And, strong in this faith, I can believe, and bid you believe that, just because 'the Lord is King,' the day shall assuredly come whereof the psalmist sang of old, 'He maketh wars to cease in all the world;' and whereof our sweet singer hymns it—

> Ring out wild bells to the wild sky!
> Ring out the thousand wars of old;
> Ring in the thousand years of peace!

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